

DROPZONE

COMMANDER



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HAWK
WARGAMES



IT IS THE YEAR 2670

A Golden Age of humanity has passed into history. A time when mankind advanced implacably and unopposed through the stars has gone beyond living memory.

Planet Earth and the original Cradle Worlds are lost to the great foe, the Scourge. The shattering invasion of this terrible enemy has torn the domains of man asunder.

The remnants of human civilisation now exist in a collection of frontier planets. Thinly spread and underdeveloped, they are pale shadows of mankind's former glories.

However, this is not an age without hope. Humanity has found new strength, unity and purpose in these times of dire fortune. The colonies are undertaking a period of vigorous, dynamic expansion, unrivalled in the history of our race, united by a common purpose - Reconquest.

The armies of the United Colonies of Mankind march towards humanities' former heartland, battling the dreaded Scourge one world at a time. Many enemies and allies await on this journey; an odyssey through the stars towards a distant and glittering goal - Earth.





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BACKGROUND

THE TIME BEFORE

A COMING OF AGE

Mankind had a troubled childhood. No period in its early history was without warfare, bloodshed and strife. Whenever the drums of war were heard, the pace of technological development accelerated. The great dictators of the 20th century and mankind's first global conflicts underscored its darkest potential for fratricide as well as a penchant for breathtaking advancements under immense pressure.

In the 21st century it was faced with a new, insidious and universal enemy, far more deadly and divisive than political turmoil; that of its own success. Humanities' very pace of development and expansion threatened to end years of progress through the unsustainable consumption of resources. Leaders and nations failed to act decisively against this long term threat through the twilight years of the Oil Age, blinkered by short term and selfish ambitions.

By the 22nd century, climate change, famine, scarcity of resources and the inevitable conflict that resulted nearly tore the human race apart. This was a century of almost constant warfare, which saw the end of nations and the formation of the continental powers. Technology continued to advance apace during this period, albeit focused towards the annihilation of enemies. By the end of the century mankind had harnessed the power of nuclear fusion, a breakthrough which finally shone a light of hope through the darkness of war.

With an almost limitless and clean source of energy at its disposal, mankind was finally able to rid itself of its fossil fuel addiction and end the fiery sunset of the Oil Age. The war torn continents at last made peace and walked together into an era of unprecedented prosperity and enlightenment.

Geoengineering technologies were able to slowly reverse the devastating climactic changes mankind had wrought. Although Earth could never recover its former natural diversity, it quickly became a totally different planet. Earth's entire surface became dedicated solely to humanities' service.

Slowly the very concept of nations as separate political entities became redundant in the face of global management needs, as proven by the bitter lessons of the previous 200 years. This new unity and clarity of purpose allowed the technologies developed during the war torn 22nd century to be harnessed for peaceful applications. Coupled with fusion power, mankind was finally able to turn its collective drive towards new horizons - the stars.

THE AGE OF DISCOVERIES

With fusion energy at its disposal and a renewed will to expand its horizons, mankind developed a whole plethora of innovations. The late 23rd and early 24th centuries saw technological advancement the like of which had not been seen since the Industrial Revolution.

The crowning achievement of this Age of Discoveries was the creation of the Spatial Distortion and Manipulation Drive, popularly known as the Foldspace or FTL (faster than light) drive. This enabled faster than light travel between celestial bodies for the first time, breaking the barriers to galactic exploration caused by the vastness of space.

The Star Age had begun.

THE AGE OF EXPLORATION AND FIRST CONTACT

With these technologies at its disposal, mankind was able to embark on exploration and colonisation of the Galaxy for the first time.

Early exploration was virtually random, hampered by the major inaccuracies of human Foldspace technology. For precise FTL jumps beyond a few light hours, a Foldspace Node is required at the destination, which acts as a beacon ensuring a relatively accurate jump. Without such beacons in place, jumps were made randomly, with no guarantee of precisely where a ship would arrive. As a result, very few habitable worlds were discovered during this period.

All of this changed upon first contact with a sentient, spacefaring alien race; the Shaltari. With mankind's first successful jumps having been achieved though its own hand, the Shaltari had deemed the time right for interaction.

The first meeting between humans and Shaltari occurred aboard the exploration frigate *Endurance* in the year 2342. All in attendance were dazzled by the sophistication of their technology, the entire deputation materialising in a moment of awestruck wonder around a single artificial construct. At first sight, it appeared that the Shaltari were physically formidable creatures, clad in geometric and lavishly ornate armoured suits towering over eight feet in height. Seconds later however, a being diminutive in stature stepped from between its guards, and extended a hand in a familiar human greeting.

The Shaltari were certainly strange to look upon. A little over four feet tall, the ambassador was humanoid, and covered from head to toe in white, translucent spines. It wore no clothes in the human manner, but was adorned with many apparently decorative ornaments, several of which were later understood to be more than simple jewellery. It had a pair of large, ovoid, penetratingly blue eyes and moved with a serene grace almost disconcerting to look upon.

Fortunately, communication proved straightforward. It transpired that the Shaltari had quietly observed mankind for centuries and had, therefore, mastered all human languages. The ambassador spoke in a deep, androgynous voice totally devoid of accent or imperfection, the archetype of perfect and characterless human speech. The Shaltari language was never encountered during these early interactions, since the aliens took care even to speak to each other in a readily comprehensible manner when in the presence of humans.

Shaltari technology proved advanced to a level unfathomable to human understanding, and indeed many still liken it to magic. They made extensive use of teleportation, and utilised a whole plethora of incomprehensible technologies. Many Shaltari devices initially appeared decorative, their geometric beauty often belying their true nature.

The Shaltari initially proved to be beneficent, and held the hand of man through some of its first steps into the Galaxy. They guided mankind to a series of lush worlds perfectly suited to human habitation and in close proximity to Earth (on a galactic scale at any rate). These worlds became known as the Cradle Worlds and developed into models of human expansion into new territories.

Through these years of peaceful interaction, human knowledge of the Shaltari themselves was limited. It was understood that the group in contact with humans was just one of a network of connected and similar societies referred to for the sake of simplicity as 'Tribes'. Each Tribe, whilst sharing the highly advanced technologies of their race, were often ideologically and culturally diverse. The particular Tribe in contact with humans described itself as 'The Friends', since its real name would be physically impossible for humans to express in their limited vocal range.

In time however, it became clear that The Friends had their own motives for guiding humanity into the cosmos. In humans, they had identified a species which could prove a potent ally against another Shaltari Tribe, with which The Friends were at war. It became apparent that Shaltari were few in number, reproduced slowly and had an almost pathological fear of death. Humans, it seemed, would make excellent foot soldiers to overcome their enemies through sheer weight of numbers.

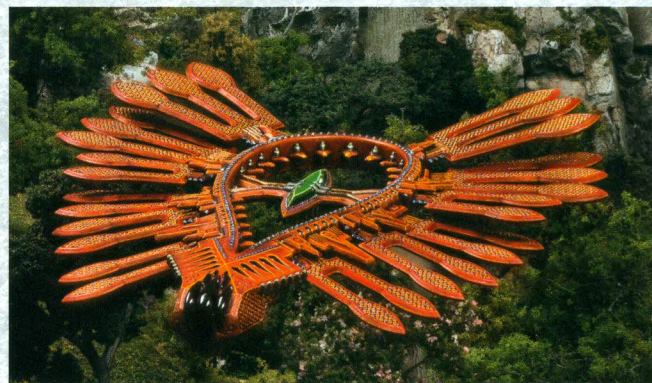
The alliance quickly broke down, since mankind's gratitude did not extend to wilfully entering a bloody war as pawns against a foe so obviously superior in technology. Since that time, the two races have maintained a tense and uneasy relationship of shifting alliances, occasionally flaring into outright conflict. With neither race willing to see wholesale slaughter, these battles have never yet escalated into total war.

THE AGE OF EXPANSION

Having been given a foothold in the Galaxy by the Shaltari, mankind was able to expand into new territories from the springboard of Earth and the bountiful Cradle Worlds.

Further planets suitable for colonisation were discovered increasingly further from Earth as the capabilities of Foldspace drives improved. Short range jumps became fairly accurate, although anything beyond 10 light hours was still a 'hit and miss' affair, which many equated to throwing a dart into an ocean blindfolded. Jumps of meaningful distance away from the Western Spiral Arm were more or less random. However, if a ship ended up near a system of potential use, Foldspace Nodes could be left behind, permitting accurate return visits. With the expanded resources afforded by the Cradle Worlds, achieving the volume of expeditions needed to make this approach effective became viable.

During the late 24th century, increasing numbers of exploitable planets were discovered. While many of these proved to be far less amenable to life than the Cradle Worlds, they nevertheless became frontier colonies of mankind, often thousands of light years from Earth.



Those who chose to live on these distant planets were a mixed and colourful group of entrepreneurs, desperados, prospectors and those simply seeking a new life far from home. Adventurous, practical and hardy populations developed on these far-flung colonies. These communities were often possessed of radically different character, but all shared a sense of dynamism and purpose. During this time, the frontier colonies represented the marginal aspects of human civilisation as a whole, and were often dismissed by the developed societies of the central planets as beneath their notice.

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The populations of the Cradle Worlds and Earth itself reaped the lion's share of the rewards of conquest, developing rapidly into sophisticated and decadent societies. Art, the architectural renaissance and opulence reigned as humanity reached the zenith of its affluence and success.

THE FALL OF THE SPHERE

In the year 2506, an unlooked for event occurred which would shatter this peaceful epoch. A small object fell from space into the atmosphere of planet Earth, eventually coming to rest in the region colloquially known as Perú. Defence scanners noted its lack of breakup during re-entry despite its tiny size, and a small research team was dispatched to investigate.

What they found was unique, inexplicable and entirely unexpected. A small, unadorned perfect sphere, of a metal-like substance but unnaturally pure white in colour. Although no larger than a tennis ball, it possessed a mass which transcended that of all known elements, needing the strength of two men to carry it from the impact crater.

Once returned to the South American EAA (Earth Administration Authority) research laboratory, extensive studies were conducted concerning the Sphere. Nothing conclusive could be gleaned after weeks of research, save that it was almost certainly a fabricated object and did not obey many conventional laws of physics. It resisted any efforts to examine it, always returning off the scale readings on any form of scanner. Even basic thermal optics rendered it pure white, despite the fact that the object was cool to the touch.

Approximately six weeks into the study, the Sphere was connected to an electrical device with a direct link to a networked computer during a routine conductivity experiment. Within seconds, the entire facility entered a state of lockdown, with all doors and systems inoperable to staff. Seconds later, a massive data spike was detected representing a vast upload to the laboratories' network. Every networked computer in the South American subcontinent locked out almost simultaneously, freeing unbelievable amounts of bandwidth to allow vast data flow into the facility.

Within minutes the spike abruptly ceased, and network operation appeared to return to normal.

Hours later, staff trapped in various areas of the sealed facility reported the characteristic sound of engines in the skies above, followed by intermittent explosions. When the dust cleared and doors became operable, dazed researchers found the test chamber breached by explosives, and the Sphere gone.

THE WARNING

Days later, a message was broadcast through all channels on all human inhabited worlds (every broadcaster being successfully hacked simultaneously moments earlier). These words were spoken softly in the native language of each region, but the English version is recorded here:

***A time of dire fortune is nigh.
Your race stands upon a knife edge.***

***An implacable foe approaches,
against which you have insufficient time
to prepare and no hope of victory.***

***We implore you to abandon your
home planet, and those nearest to it.***

***Join Us over Vega IV in one year hence and
We will guide you to your salvation.***

Fail, and only death awaits you.

During the months after the broadcast, tensions arose in the populations of the central planets. Some dismissed The Warning as scaremongering, nothing more than an elaborate joke. Religious cults grew in popularity, each proclaiming the coming of judgement day and wailing in atonement for sins, both real and imagined.

Normally, it would have been easy to dismiss The Warning as insidious lies, were it not for the eerie exactness and completeness of the hacking of every communication channel known to man in the same instant. The EAA was unable to marshal any kind of concerted response or explanation, a failure mirrored by the administrations of all of Earth's colonies. Links with the South American network lock out had also not gone unnoticed.

As the months wore on, and the deadline approached, instances of looting, panic and chaos increased. An uncanny and unprecedented paranoia began to fester in the heart of societies. Governments tuned in on themselves in order to quell subversion in their own ranks, and ordinary communities, families and friends became divided over whether to flee, fight or simply to ignore The Warning.

Weeks before the deadline, the instances of theft of FTL capable vessels, and mutinies aboard EAA Navy warships became commonplace. All social classes were forced to take action and pick sides during the build-up. Heartrending tales of broken families and sundered friendships are rife from that dark time.

Days before the deadline, a sizable EAA battlefleet took up station over Vega IV, an uninhabited rock roughly equidistant from the majority of the Cradle Worlds and indeed Earth itself.

Arrayed against this formidable force, a ragtag but vast fleet of civilian and mutinous military vessels began to assemble. By the day of the deadline, the Abandonist fleet had grown to epic proportions. Thousands of vessels containing millions of people from all over the central planets had congregated over Vega IV.

With orders not to engage aggressively, but with a licence to use force if required to prevent a mass exodus, the well armed but outnumbered EAA fleet waited nervously for the moment of truth. As the clock ticked towards zero-hour, millions held their breath. Mass driver weapons were readied and aligned, shields were raised and sub-light engines brought to full power.

Precisely one year after The Warning was issued, a simple text based message was broadcast to all Abandonist vessels:

```
+++ WE ADVISE YOU
    TO PROCEED
    TO COORDINATES
    WE HAVE LOADED +++

+++ WE HAVE MADE
    YOUR DRIVES
    ACCURATE +++

+++ YOU HAVE MADE
    THE RIGHT CHOICE +++
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Spikes in data transfer indicated a simultaneous hacking of all Abandonist vessels, indicating the insertion of Foldspace coordinates into their drives.

THE BATTLE OF VEGA

The first Civil War humanity would fight in space lasted for only three hours, but the resultant slaughter was on a scale never before seen in the history of space combat.

As thousands of Abandonist vessels began to power up their Foldspace drives, an order was issued by the EAA fleet to power down, or be fired upon. Most ignored the order. As vessels began to wink out, the first shots were fired by the largest Abandonist vessels in an attempt to screen the smaller craft from potential fire.

An unrelenting and murderous exchange of fire ensued, both sides now acting on split second decisions. Since they were second to open fire, the EAA vessels bore the brunt of the onslaught, and suffered heavy casualties. As thousands of Abandonist ships winked out, the balance of power swung their way. The slowest ships to power up in the Abandonist fleet suffered the full wrath of the battered EAA fleet, and many were destroyed or disabled before they were able to escape.

No one knows the precise number of casualties in that brief but climactic exchange, but it has since been estimated that over 10 million people were killed in those three desperate hours. No trace of the destination coordinates could be found aboard any of the captured Abandonist ships, and to this day their destination remains unknown.

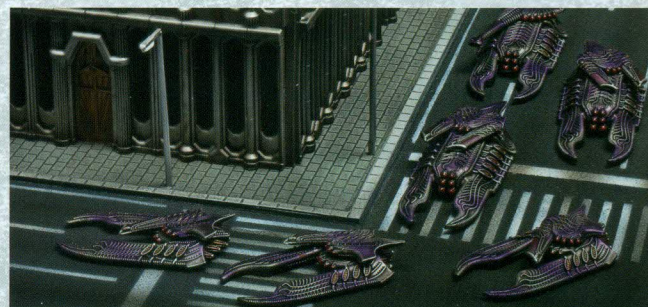
It is estimated that around 2% of the population of the central planets escaped with the Abandonist fleet, the vast majority of those present at the battle.

The Three Hour War had cost the EAA fleet dearly. Half its vessels were crippled or destroyed, and almost every ship had sustained battle damage. As the remains of the fleet limped back to Earth, its commanders cursed the Abandonists for instigating such needless carnage, and for betraying their own people to an uncertain fate.

THE COMING OF THE GREAT ENEMY

Mankind's golden age came to an abrupt and catastrophic end on 3rd May, 2507, just two days after the Battle of Vega. The battered fleet and small peacetime army were utterly unprepared for the nightmare to come.

Despite heightened alert and full mobilisation, brought on by a prudent desire not to entirely ignore The Warning, the army represented only a small percentage of the population. It had been over 300 years since mankind's last full scale war, and troops were more accustomed to peacekeeping duties than real combat.



At 06:00hrs EES (Earth Eastern Standard) time, thousands upon thousands of outlandish, chillingly alien ships leapt out of Foldspace and began moving at full speed towards Earth. Foldspace drives cannot function in close proximity to gravity wells, and as such it would take this unknown enemy eight hours to reach low orbit. Such a grim countdown only served to insidiously claw at the morale of the men on the ground, gripping their weapons and readying their vehicles for the coming battle.

The tattered EAA fleet might have been able to make an impact on the invasion armada, were it not for its battering at the hands of the Abandonists not two days earlier. The mere fact that their belief in The Warning had been vindicated was never enough for the rest of humanity to forgive them for their cowardice and their betrayal.

As it was, the vast alien armada simply swept the EAA fleet aside, taking minimal damage in return. The destruction of the fleet was near total, with only a small collection

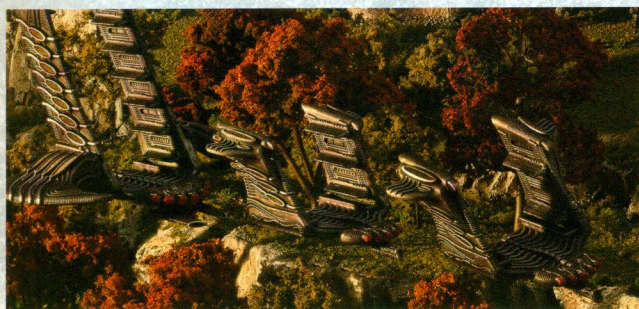
of frigates, destroyers and lighters able to escape the slaughter. The men on the ground would be on their own.

Shortly after the armada achieved low orbit, the skies over Earth's cities blackened with bizarre dropships, the like of which had never been seen before. Interceptors and anti-air defences managed to take a grim toll on the enemy, such were the volume of targets. In reality it was like throwing stones at a lake.

Once planetfall had been made, wave upon wave of outlandish grav-tanks began their sinister advance, sweeping the streets of anything that moved. Their appearance was deeply unsettling, almost biological, suggestively insectile and menacingly sleek. Although mercifully short ranged, countermeasures appeared to have virtually no effect on their weapons, which caused horrendous annihilation upon all unlucky enough to be hit. EAA Tanks were engulfed in blue, superheated plasma, and emerged as nothing more than molten slag, all traces of their crews lost in the morass.

Once the fighting passed into structures, the ordinary foot soldiers braced to face the enemy, and to get their first glance of the aggressors. Thousands of men were mercilessly slaughtered without ever having a chance to look upon their foe. Their weapons had a horrific effect on the human body. Men who witnessed their comrades cooked and immolated from the inside out in a consuming blue fire quickly abandoned their positions in terror, and were cut down as they fled. Only when the handfuls of desperate survivors had rallied, backs to the wall, did they stand and fight.

Successes were few and far between, occurring only in the rare instances where the enemy were temporarily spread thinly. In tight, confined spaces the fighting occasionally degenerated into hand-to-hand combat. It was during these moments that men first looked into the eyes of their tormentors.



They were roughly humanoid in appearance. Heavily clothed in thick garments, what was visible of their pale skin appeared covered in small, glistening armour plates. They had no visible ears and flat, elongated noses. Their eyes were full of hate, malice and pain, and appeared to burn red from the inside. The skin sweated profusely, and in time it became clear that they needed to consume fluids at an alarming rate, be it water or the blood of the fallen, even their own. They fought with reckless abandon with little regard for their own lives, and always appeared on the edge of madness, such were their violent, inconsistent and jerky movements.

Out in the streets, no crew were ever sighted, should any of their vehicles be destroyed. On occasion, a putrid, black, tar like substance could be seen oozing from stricken vehicles like congealed blood from a wound. Such observations were few however, since the destruction of EAA armoured units was almost total amidst the carnage.

Within hours, the bulk of the fighting was over. Any human survivors were utterly routed, and surviving army units and civilians alike abandoned the cities in a terrified rush. This was merely the beginning of their torment, which for the majority would last beyond their natural lives and for some would only end in death at the hands of their former brothers...

EXODUS

Despite the valiant, desperate and ultimately vain struggles for the cities, the focus for survivors shifted to escape. The scale of the planet wide invasion made this near suicidal but many, nevertheless, made the attempt. Available ships which had not been destroyed in the onslaught or commandeered by the hated Abandonists were few and far between. Of those that managed to get airborne, very few managed to put enough distance between themselves and Earth to allow the use of their Foldspace drives.

Atmosphere capable EAA fleet vessels which had managed to disengage from the cataclysmic orbital battle were occasionally able to affect daring rescues of stranded civilians. Myriad tales of heroism and sacrifice are still told from those desperate hours. Even so, less than 1% of Earth's population managed to escape. For the vast majority, there would be no rescue and no respite from the living hell that Earth would soon become...

Ships fleeing to the Cradle Worlds faced equally horrifying scenes. No sooner had ships winked out of Foldspace, than it was obvious that the invasion had covered all the central planets in a blanket of death and despair. All communication channels were filled with the screams of the desperate and the dying, pleas for help and blank static.

The wisest captains quickly recharged their Foldspace drives, and made jumps to more remote outposts. Many were able to escape before being engaged by the enemy. Others were not so fortunate, and faced destruction at the hands of hesitating officers, slow to recharge drives or simply bad luck. Many had fled Earth seeking refuge on the Cradle Worlds, only to find themselves re-entering realspace right in the midst of new enemy fleets, and were destroyed in short order.

The only worlds to escape the carnage were the remote frontier colonies. For some reason, the enemy had yet to turn its gaze to them. It has been estimated that only one in ten human beings had survived this virtual apocalypse.

In the aftermath, the populations of the mining towns and young settlements on the frontiers were astonished to receive the bloodied and battered refugees of the affluent central planets. At first it proved a culture shock for both parties, and tensions ran high. In time, they would arise united from the ashes, and forge ahead in this dark new age.

LICKING WOUNDS

Why the enemy failed to attack the colonies remained a mystery. Many and varied theories were postulated, each less convincing than the last. The whirlwind of chaos that surrounded the invasion had provided few opportunities to make proper study of the enemy. All that was known of their physiology, strengths and weaknesses was gleaned from the crucible of combat. The few alien bodies brought back (mostly those who had pursued terrified civilians aboard fleeing ships) yielded few clues.

It appeared the aliens were carbon based life forms not too dissimilar to Earth vertebrates in taxonomy. Whilst bearing a superficially lizard-like appearance, they were found to be warm blooded, oxygen breathers. The only puzzle that emerged was that aspects of their nervous system appeared radically different and far less biologically familiar. While clearly part of the body, it shared little similarity with the rest, on a cellular, chemical or purely subjective level.

The behaviour of the alien warriors also seemed at odds with the mighty undertaking in careful planning that the invasion must have required. Their almost deranged and ungraceful actions were mystifying in the extreme. Also, rumours of other, more terrifying creatures began to emerge, mostly garbled forth by lone survivors or wounded men. Tales of beasts, monsters, even demons became increasingly prevalent. Much of this was rightly attributed to the terror and chaos the attack had engendered, since men had witnessed death on a horrific scale and of a gruesome nature.

The sinister designs of their purpose and the devastating effect of their onslaught led to a popular name for the dreaded enemy - the Scourge.

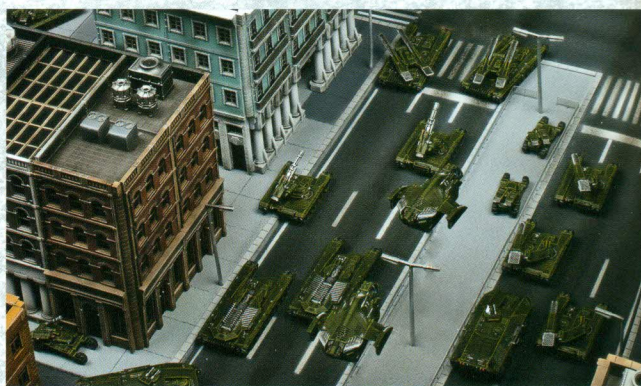
In time, it became obvious that the Scourge must have no usable route to the colonies. An immediate and precautionary measure instigated by the colonies was to reconfigure their Foldspace nodes, making it impossible for ships outside the colonies to jump to them with any precision. Even captured human ships from Earth or the Cradle Worlds could not now follow. While this denied any survivors who had failed to reach the colonies a safe haven, it was rightly seen as a necessary measure.

Since Scourge ships were unable to simply jump to the colonies' locations (something it was reasoned they must have knowledge of by that time), it was postulated that the Scourge required Foldspace nodes just as human ships did (unlike the super-advanced Shaltari, who seemed able to jump anywhere at will). This gave the survivors a measure of safety, although also begged the question of how the Scourge fleets had arrived with eerie exactitude during the invasion.

THE UNITED COLONIES OF MANKIND

The next 160 years saw the colonies transform from fringe societies into developed, prosperous civilisations. The influx of refugees from the central planets, coupled with a rise in birth rate caused a population explosion. For the first time, the vast mineral wealth of the colonies (which had made them attractive as settlements in the first place) was exploited to the full. Towns and cities grew at amazing speed. Unlike the opulent, refined centres of the central planets, these were thriving, disorganised and rapidly constructed melting pots, making up for in purpose what they lacked in style. The galaxy was an entirely different place for humanity ever since the invasion, and it had risen to the challenge with gusto.

This amazing story of rebirth can be partly attributed to the establishment of a multi planet federation formed in the early stages of the aftermath - The United Colonies of Mankind (UCM). The colonies had charged headlong into an unprecedented level of cooperation and fraternity. This was driven by the overwhelming need to combat the Scourge, or face certain annihilation. Few were under any illusions that the Scourge would not eventually find and note an accurate route to the colonies.



This new super-state became strongly militant in nature. Armament and military training reached a level not seen since the war torn 22nd century, although for the first time in human history, this was directed against an alien species. New weapons were developed, and a state of the art battlefleet was laid down. After over one and a half centuries of such progression and meteoric growth, the United Colonies finally felt able to challenge the Scourge, and regain their lost homelands.

RECONNAISSANCE, RESISTANCE AND REVELATIONS

The first steps towards vengeance involved further study and scouting missions. No UCM vessels had dared to venture near the central planets for over 160 years, and none were prepared for what they would find.

Early scouting missions sent the smallest and fastest FTL capable ships man had ever produced; Lysander class scout lighters. These were marvels of human ingenuity, designed for the sole purpose of reconnaissance. Their low FTL charge time, first class drives and small, stealthy design made these early scouting trips feasible.

Nevertheless, these forays into hostile territory were still extremely hazardous, and many were lost to roving Scourge picket ships. A complex system of ciphers and encryption ensured the protection of the colonial node locations, preventing Scourge pursuit to the colonies should any ships fall into enemy hands. In any case, a captain's last duty in the face of certain capture was the destruction of their Foldspace navi-computer. The bravery of these men and their crews provided the UCM's first view into the lost centres of human civilisation.

The first surprise was that it was possible to accurately return to the central planets at all. The survival of a handful of Foldspace nodes almost certainly indicated the presence of friendly human forces. All space-borne nodes had been destroyed in short order by the Scourge, but several planetside nodes were still in operation. The fact that these antique machines were still operable after over one and a half centuries later suggested regular maintenance - an incredible revelation.

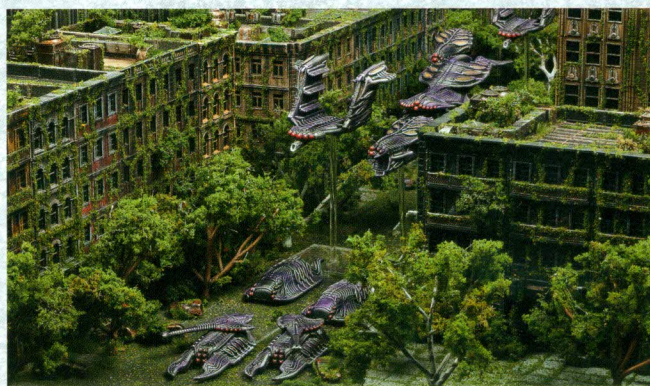
It was simply far too risky to attempt unencrypted wireless contact with any survivors on the ground, since Scourge surveillance of all channels was deemed a likely probability. Instead, daring ground insertions of recon teams were proposed as the only possible chance of establishing contact with stranded ground forces.

Months of careful planning preceded these daring missions. Extensive observation of urban centres during these sorties yielded many surprises. It soon became obvious that many man-made structures and urban complexes were still being maintained and were in use, most notably the industrial areas. Further analysis highlighted several alien additions to these areas, indicating that they were in fact under Scourge control. This was a surprising development to scout teams, who expected to see mankind's great cities entirely levelled to the ground.

Eventually, antique EAA personal distress beacons were detected. The obscure and archaic encryption standard these beacons utilised made them difficult for UCM forces to locate. These clearly had been chosen by resistance fighters on the ground as suitably obscure markers to escape the Scourge's notice. The discovery of these beacons gave fresh hope to scouts, and enhanced the potential for success in ground missions.

Not long after, the first UCN boots made planetfall on Jericho, one of the outer Cradle Worlds. The sky was grey with the traces of heavy industry and the air slightly acid, but otherwise they found the surface much more hospitable than expected. Homing in on the origin of the beacon, they eventually made contact with a desperate and shabby group of human survivors. As the remnants of the old shook hands with and embraced the new, tales were told of existence in the former centres of civilisation.

It transpired that human resistance had not been utterly crushed by the Scourge onslaught. A small minority managed to continue resistance from the sewers, woodlands and wildernesses of Jericho. It was they who had moved and maintained the Foldspace nodes, in the slim hope that one day help would come. It was revealed though, that the doom of the majority was worse than had ever been anticipated. Even genocide was deemed to have been preferable to the horrific fate of the unfortunate masses.



Months after the invasion, resistance fighters were appalled to see what appeared to be humans fighting alongside the Scourge warriors. None could understand how such traitors could collaborate with the vile aliens. Once several were captured however, similarities to the scourge warriors were obvious. They had oily skin, unquenchable thirst, and appeared somewhat pale in complexion. Their eyes were full of hate and malice, and they seemed incapable of speech. Their movements, while far more controlled than the Scourge warriors themselves, were nevertheless somewhat jerky.

As time wore on, these human collaborators became more and more numerous, and slowly became increasingly akin to the 'lizard warriors'. Captured individuals sweated profusely, exhibited insatiable thirst and were almost white in colour, with blazing, hate filled red eyes. They were clearly no longer entirely human - they were Scourge warriors.

Resistance fighters had observed that they did not age physically, but degenerated gradually. A horrific truth was abundantly clear; these were the same unfortunate souls captured by the Scourge during the invasion, over one and a half centuries ago. The scouts soon learned that very few of the original 'lizard warriors' remained, and that UCM forces would be facing an entirely unexpected and horrific enemy; the 'possessed' remains of their own people.

A PLAN OF ACTION

After years of intelligence gathering and military build-up, the UCM High Council determined a course of action which would shape the mighty campaigns to come.

With the revelation that human resistance remained on the Cradle Worlds, it was concluded that a simple mission of extermination was out of the question. Annihilation by thermonuclear bombardment from orbit would not only deny the UCM use of the Cradle Worlds in future, but would also cause unacceptable casualties among the resistance forces. Battle would have to be joined the 'old fashioned way', by boots and armour on the ground. This would not simply be a war of retribution, but of liberation.

Despite the unprecedented military power of the UCM, it was deemed unwise to embark on an invasion across multiple fronts, but instead to attack one system at a time, starting with those furthest from Earth, where Scourge forces were likely to be weakest. That way, the Scourge superiority of numbers could be counteracted by a series of surgical hammer blows.



THE UNEXPECTED, THE UNREPENTANT, THE UNWELCOME

On the eve of the planned invasion, a small group of ships jumped unannounced into the vicinity of Aurum, current seat planet of the UCM High Council. Apparently human in origin, these ships were escorted to orbit unmolested, and hailed by the UCMF heavy cruiser Rubicon. The visitors declared themselves peaceful in intent, and demanded a parley with those of authority.

After much debate, a small delegation was allowed first onto Rubicon for inspection, and then to the surface and into the presence chamber of the UCM High Council, which happened to be in session due to the imminent invasion.

The newcomers were clearly physically human, but had an unearthly cast of feature, which combined with a supercilious demeanour made observers uneasy, although none could even attest to themselves as to why. Their ships were obviously human, but far sleeker than the utilitarian, industrial UCM vessels. They wore simple white clothes, but their skin reflected occasional flashes of silver, thought by many as indicative of bionic enhancement.



The strangers greeted the council politely, bowed in respect, and made the following declaration:

"We are representatives of The White Sphere, humble aspects of the Post-Human Republic. We respectfully acknowledge and appreciate your hospitality.

Generations ago, our forebears fought a desperate and wasteful battle against your own. In a time of great confusion, the actions taken were deemed prudent. We do not apologise for them, and expect none likewise from yourselves. We do however express our great sorrow and regret at the loss of life engendered by them.

We do not come to reconcile. We suspect that forgiveness cannot be earned by us in so short a time.

We come instead, to advise. The enterprise you are about to undertake is rash, ill-timed and inadequately prepared. You have progressed admirably in finding your strength once more, but in this folly you will open a Pandora's Box of perpetual war and death in which none of your lives will witness its ending.

The Warning of the White Sphere proved accurate, and with that in mind we humbly beseech you to heed these words."

Only silence greeted this. In the minds of all those present, the truth was evident - these were the descendants of the hated Abandonists, those who had betrayed humanity before the coming of the Scourge and had wantonly ravaged the fleet to safeguard their own skins. Murmurs rose among the councillors, men who had listened to the tales of their forefathers, whose perceptions of their former brethren had only blackened in nearly 170 years. After what seemed like hours of indignant silence, Helena Beleque, President of the UCM, stood to speak.

"I think I speak for all my exalted colleagues, and indeed for the people of the United Colonies, in welcoming the news of your miraculous survival. Here we are all human, and all now know that we face graver threats to our existence than each other. The existence of others of our persecuted species must only be a boon, in the face of the enemy that besets us."

After allowing the disgruntled rumblings in the chamber to die down, she continued,

"However, I think I also share their sentiments in stating that indeed, we do not forgive your forefathers for their actions. Their cowardice, treachery and acts of aggression weakened our species at a time where every ounce of strength was needed. If you cannot find a place in your address for contrition, then neither can we forgive you."

In the silence after this statement, the ambassador for the Republic spoke, "You are correct and mistaken in equal measure, Madam President. Our survival was undeniably miraculous, and we do indeed show no repentance, though only those unable to accept the truth would have judged our actions cowardly. As for your first assumption, I beg to correct you, we are no longer simply human. We are far more than that. As such, we appraise your chances in this enterprise as slim."

President Bellaque was quick to respond in harsh tones, "You don't reckon on the strength of our men and the burning desire in their hearts. The Scourge have laid waste to our homelands in a malignant occupation that our consciences cannot continue to countenance. Join us in this great task, and in time you may repay the blood of the millions murdered over Vega. Until that day comes, consider yourselves outside our care, and our enemies if you dare hinder us in this purpose."

After a lengthy silence, the famously blunt Supreme Marshal Zachiev arose from the bench of the Council chamber and spat, "Leave us, traitor. We have nothing more to say to you."

As the Republican delegation departed the chamber in reserved but resolute silence, any hope of a united humanity left with them.

RECONQUEST

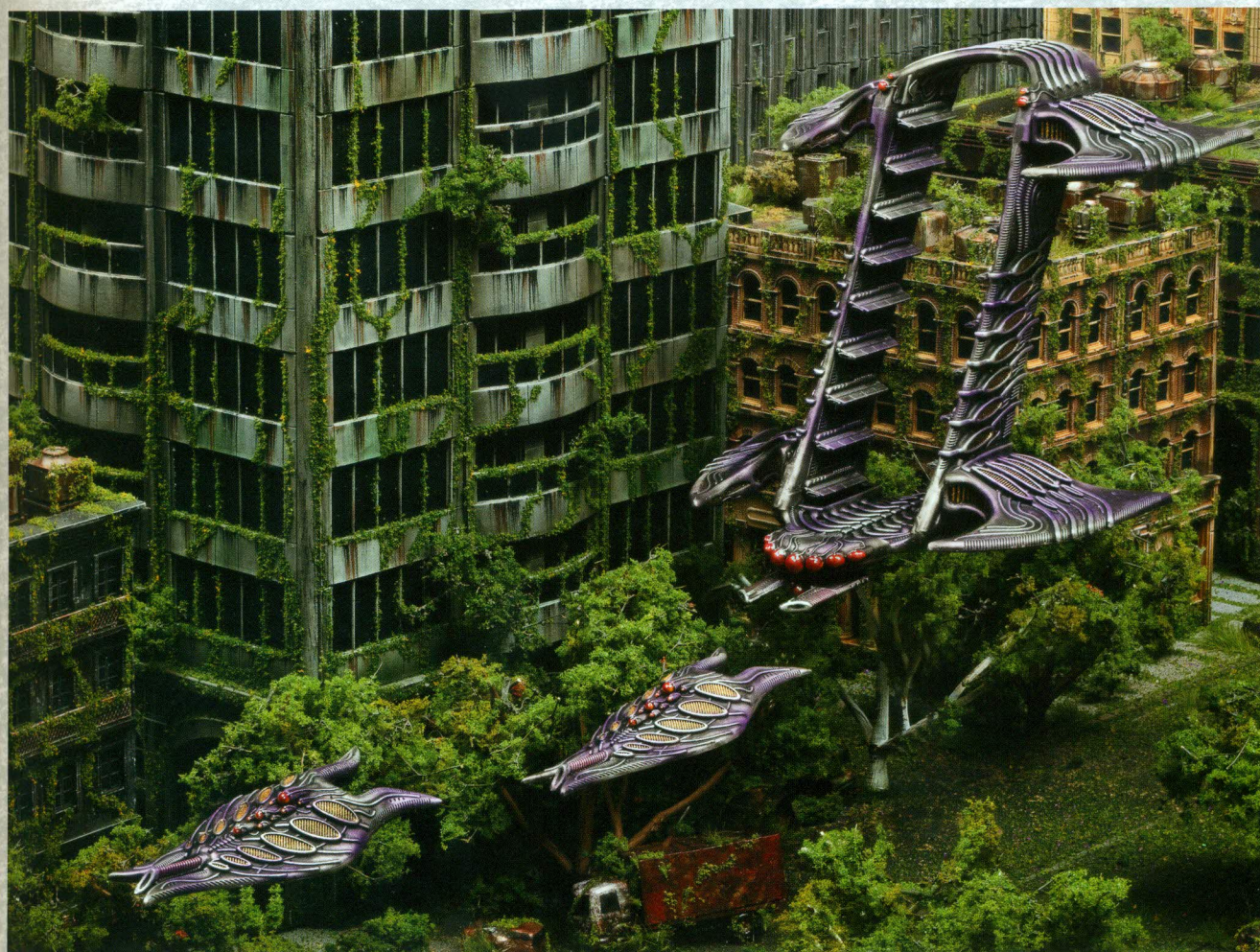
Twenty-four Earth hours after the delegation were permitted to depart in peace, the largest fleet in human history began to power up its Foldspace drives. Thousands of vessels, from cruisers, strike carriers and escorts to vast dreadnoughts formed up. Each member of the vast colonial military machine prepared to do their part for humanity in the countless unknown battles that awaited them. As the anticipation reached fever pitch, the gravelled voice of Supreme Admiral Jacob 'Granite' Halsey sounded on the intercoms of every ship, great and small.

"Jump in thirty seconds. All ships will transition on my mark."

The Colonies expect each and every one of you to do your duty for the species, and for your comrades. The Scourge shall pay for their presumption that any alien can best humanity! They will rue the day they ever set foot on the good soil of Earth! Into harm's way we shall sail, and through the darkness we shall triumph! God speed and fair fortune be with you all. Good hunting men!

Ready your weapons.

Jumping in three... two...one... JUMP!"





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The loading deck of the Strike Carrier Aurum's Grace was eerily calm, especially given the occasion. The gravity of what would soon transpire wasn't lost on a single deck hand, infantry grunt, pilot or officer. Hundreds of Legionnaires were assembling in precise, regimented lines ahead of a seemingly endless rank of Bear armoured personnel carriers, preparing to take their final orders before embarkation.

Pacing the cold, polished deck, Corporal Huxley allowed himself a moment's contemplation, a calm of sorts, before the inevitable storm. Abruptly, Sergeant Quincy roused the Corporal from his quiet reverie and into a stance of acute alertness. His posture was crafted with immense care to convey everything that a Colonial Legionnaire should be at this moment, while at the same time introducing a hint of defiance mingled with a distinct lack of respect for his superior officer.

As Quincy passed him by, Huxley kept eye contact for a fraction of a second longer than was natural. They'd been together since basic, and a quiet animosity had brewed brewing since their first day in the academy mess. He knew that Quincy believed and trusted in all they were told in training, while Huxley suspected that any amount of exercises could be no substitute for actual combat; an experience they would soon be sharing together. Ten years as a Beastherder on his home planet had taught Huxley a few things about raw terror.

"Today, Gentlemen", announced Quincy in that overly formal Aurum accent that the Corporal so loathed, "is the day that the Colonies finally take the fight back to the enemy! If you trust in your training and your equipment, you will live to fight again!". "Great..." mused Huxley, a man who trusted in neither. "Come on then lads, let's have at 'em!" barked Huxley to his fire team in the far more rustic cadences of Maganum's pastures.

Soon his entire squad of fifteen Legionnaires were locked into their drop harnesses, each preparing themselves for the abyss in their own ways. Hagnaar checked his weapon far more often than was natural, Charlie told jokes to anyone who cared, while Jonson was quietly being sick into his helmet. Others had their own pre-drop mantras. Huxley prided himself in having no such baubles; he fervently wished to be back on this ship in three hours time, mission accomplished and with all his arms and legs still on.

"Drop vehicle inbound!" cried Logan, their dropship pilot. Huxley keyed his HUD into the Bear's external optics, and panned round the massive hangar. As far as the eye could see, Condor and Albatross dropships were descending towards their cargos on massive loading gantries. A sudden deep thump reverberated from both sides of the Bear as the Condor's clamps hit home. Far too soon, it seemed to Huxley, the cry of "Upper atmo close!" resonated from the deck announcer. This is the bit the Corporal dreaded most.

Almost immediately the ship rolled violently, as the upper atmosphere of Atlantis Prime lashed the hull with merciless force. Split seconds later, the deck claxon started to whine and the ship shuddered alarmingly. "Enemy hunter vessel incursion! They're passed our cruiser screen!" Quincy didn't need to hear anything more. "Emergency drop! Open those bays now! For God's sake, get us out of here Logan!", "Training has its merits I guess", grunted Huxley, moments before his world went wild as their Condor lurched and finally plummeted away from their stricken Strike Carrier, seconds before a colossal explosion burned past the vision slits and torched the Bear's armour plating.

"Optics are toast!" cried Logan, "switching to MK1 Eyeball". "Damn", cursed Huxley, who now knew he was flying blind all the way to the LZ, since his HUD was just showing static. As he cast his eye around the Bear's interior, the Corporal caught a glimpse of Quincy's vacant, mute face. He'd gone silent as the grave as things had gone South. "The Grace is history" intoned Logan, "I'm sorry, but she's listing into the gravity well, all repulsors and shields failed. She'll burn up in the next few minutes". Logan's news was met with a stoic silence from the squad. The 'Good Grace' as she came to be known had been their home for many months.

A lot of new and old friends had just been taken from them, but Huxley knew that now was not the time to get sentimental. "Right lads. You know the score. This is going to be one hell of a landing. Fleet has met with serious resistance, and I believe that we're in for the same, or worse. Clear your heads, check your weapons and stow your gear. Tomorrow we grieve for absent friends, today we kill! For Mankind!"



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THE UNITED COLONIES OF MANKIND

Forged in desperation, united by adversity and resurgent in power, the UCM exists for a single purpose - to wrest mankind's lost strongholds from the clutches of the Scourge. A collection of diverse and remote frontier worlds, the UCM is a restless cultural melting pot, bubbling with a righteous desire for vengeance.

One and a half centuries after the Scourge captured Earth and the Cradle Worlds, the UCM has expanded beyond all recognition. The greatest military force in the history of humanity has been assembled; a vast armada recently unleashed against enemies old and new.

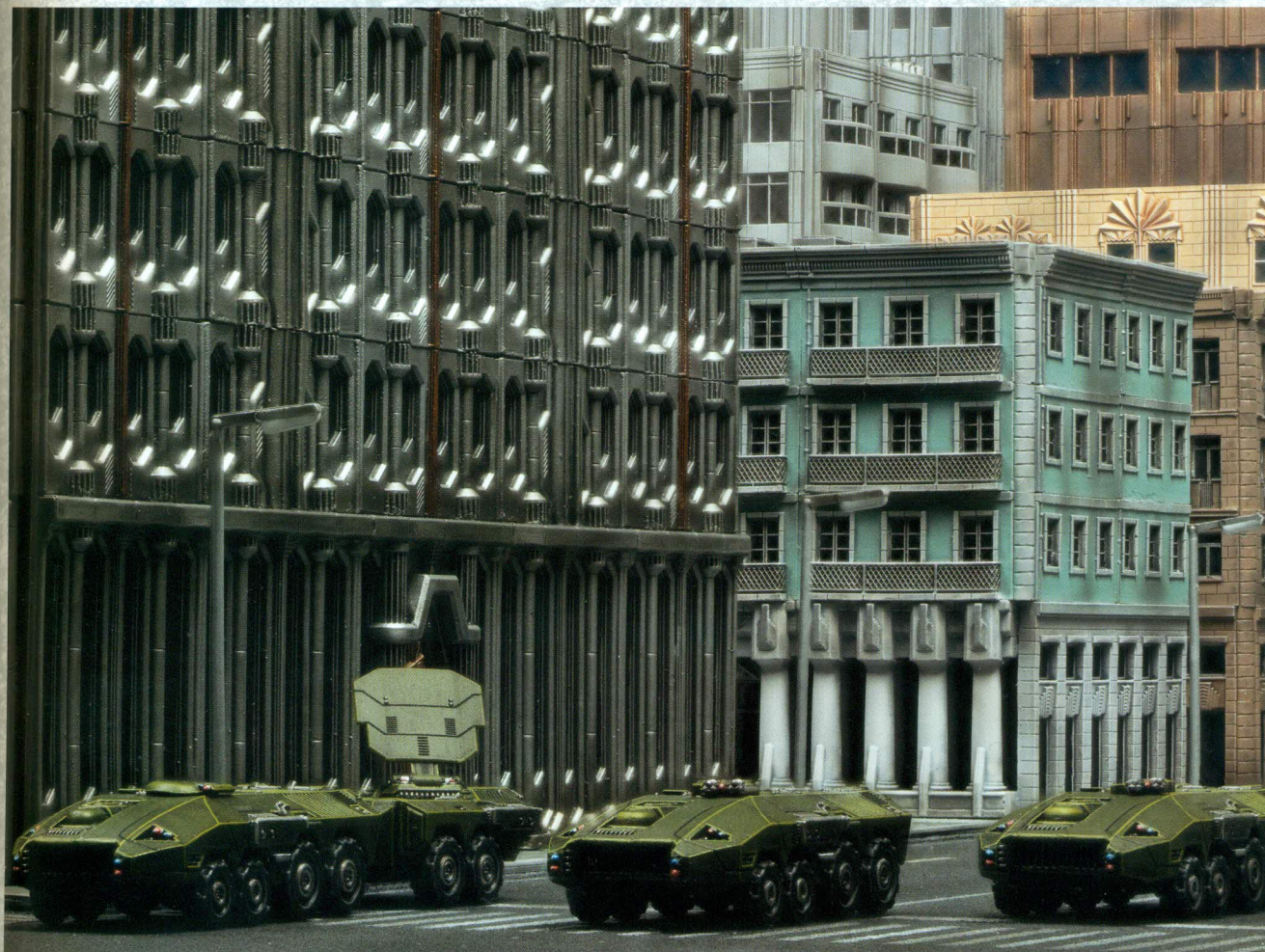
THE COLONIES

The UCM consists of a series of former frontier planets, once peopled only by desperadoes, ne'er do wells and enterprising characters, eager to forge new lives and seek fortunes. These worlds were not chosen for their beauty or amenity, but rather for their considerable mineral wealth.

The course of their development was irrevocably altered in the chaotic aftermath of the Scourge invasion, when scores of fleeing refugees descended on these obscure backwaters. A measure of the enterprising and hardy character of the original inhabitants influenced this massive influx of new blood, creating a new and dynamic civilisation.

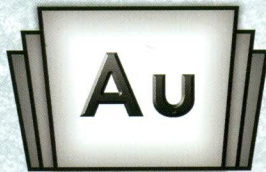
Today, the colonies have become the industrial powerhouses they were originally intended to be, churning out the mighty war machine required to take on the Scourge. Their extensive natural resources have proven crucial to mankind's spectacular recovery from total defeat. The estimated population of the UCM has recently exceeded 20 billion souls.

All the UCM's planets are located far beyond the Western Spiral Arm of the Galaxy. While there are officially hundreds of worlds in the UCM, the majority are nothing more than barren rocks, with only tiny outposts and mining concerns. A relatively small number are of central importance in the UCM and house the vast majority of its people. The grandest of these are colloquially known as 'The Big Dozen'.



'THE BIG DOZEN'

AURUM - The most heavily urbanised of the colonies, Aurum is the current seat of the UCM central government. One of the oldest colonies, it was settled early in the Age of Expansion. Aurum was an instant magnet for prospectors and industrialists due to its extensive gold deposits, symbolised in its naming. The practice of naming frontier worlds after metallic elements was continued, although later names were allocated arbitrarily. Aurum's mild climate, 0.95G gravity and 22 hour days make it more amenable to civilian life than other colonies, and today it the most populous of all UCM planets. Aurum's sprawling urban jungles bear the closest resemblance to mankind's lost cities, shadows of a more decadent age.



FERRUM - The largest and most bountiful of the UCM planets able to support life, Ferrum has been an industrial powerhouse for over two centuries. It is a world of vast mines, sprawling factories and titanic processing plants. Ferrum's immense wealth in natural resources has made it indispensable to the UCM military machine. It is home to Ferrous Motors, manufacturer of all UCM battle tanks. With a gravity of 1.4G, 32 hour days and a max 60°C diurnal temperature variation, it is a harsh planet on which to live. Ferrum's people are hardy, uncompromising souls who often make excellent recruits for the Colonial Legions.



CHROMIA - A veritable smorgasbord of rare elements and compounds, Chromia has been an attractive mining proposition since its discovery. However, conditions on the surface are utterly inimical to life. Even today it has a tiny population, confined to atmospherically sealed complexes. Chromia is, nevertheless, the UCM's premier source of cobalt, molybdenum, osmium, palladium, platinum, rhenium, rhodium and tungsten.



MAGANUM - A world of exceptional fertility, Maganum is the bread basket of the UCM. Dependable rainfall, excellent growing temperatures, microbial life and wonderfully fertile soil made this planet the archetype of astro-agriculture and flora introduction. Vast quantities of food and other biological products are now grown on Maganum, which has comfortable (albeit wet) living conditions. Its stoic farmers make excellent foot soldiers, although an unusually high number of the UCM's great generals hail from this quiet but fruitful world.



CUPRUM - An unremarkable world compared to some of the other, more exotic planets in the UCM, Cuprum is nevertheless one of its most populous. Earth-like conditions made Cuprum immediately attractive for colonisation. It supports a wide range of industrial concerns, most notably the gigantic Cuprum Drive Yards, manufacturers of Foldspace drive units for civilian and military use. It is also home of Cuprum Light Armour Works (CLAW), producers of many UCM military vehicles.



NICCOLUM - As blue a gas giant, Niccolum itself is utterly inhospitable. Its crushing gravity, thousand mile wide storms and toxic atmosphere make venturing anywhere near the surface impossible. The planet's extensive ring system, however, proved a valuable prize for early explorers. Countless mineral rich rocks circle Niccolum, containing rare metals at far higher concentrations than found in typical planet crusts. A series of orbital mining facilities were built to tap this rich resource. With such complexes and metallic riches already present, Niccolum was the obvious choice of HQ for UCM Fleet Command and the home docks. Its vast shipyards turn out most UCM vessels, which can be built using mainly native materials. Niccolum has by far the highest space-borne population in the UCM, with many citizens living their whole lives in space. An entire orbital civilisation, in place solely to produce, support and crew the UCM's massive battlefleets.



STANNUM - Comically known as 'The Fridge', Stannum is an icy moon of Niccolum. Temperatures regularly drop below -200°C at night, which are irregular in pattern due to frequent planetary eclipses. Despite its inhospitable nature, Stannum's surface features several fusion heated, sealed cities. It serves as a spring of pure, fresh water for the vast dockyards of Niccolum, as well as other local UCM worlds. Predominantly, it is an unrivalled source of liquid oxygen, which can be found in a planet-wide ocean 25 km below the surface. These vast reserves enable the efficient export of huge amounts of LOx, supporting a thriving terraforming industry.



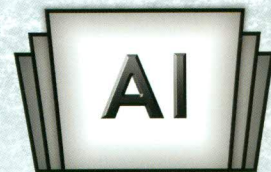
PLATINA - Discovered only a few years prior to the Scourge invasion, Platina is the only planet in the UCM which can unequivocally be described as beautiful. Devoid of natural life, its magnificence is entirely geologic. Breathtaking vistas and spectacular weather provide an occasional respite from the toils of daily life to affluent tourists. Its kaleidoscopic plains, stunning crystal beaches and awesome formations remain relatively unspoilt. Platina is unsuitable for permanent habitation, as its elliptical orbit carries it perilously close to its blazing sun once a year. However, its unrivalled gemstone reserves made it an attractive target for seasonal prospectors, and indeed Platina is still the UCM's primary source of diamond.



TITANIA - Commonly known as 'The Scorchers', Titania is largely a desert planet. A massive 220°C diurnal temperature variation makes its surface hostile during the day and icily cold at night. Its considerable mineral wealth attracted early prospectors and today Titania is a highly industrialised world. Its large population live deep underground in a planet-wide network of natural caves. These often contain large subterranean H2O lakes. Their distance from the surface evens out the wild shifts in temperature to a relatively constant 25°C. Titania's caves were quickly identified as some of the most defensible locations in the entire UCM, and much of the Colonial Army now call them home. Enormous military strongholds, barracks and armaments factories are commonplace.



ALUMINIA - This blue planet is almost entirely covered by deep, rolling oceans. Fish as well as prey fauna and flora were introduced here from Earth at an early stage, the planet being otherwise devoid of life. Today, inconceivable numbers of these fish swim its enveloping, predator free sea. Almost all the floating townships of Alumina exist to serve the vast fishing industry, and provide much of the protein consumed in the UCM.



ARGENTA - This world is peculiar among the colonies, in that a wide range of advanced, carbon based lifeforms were present at discovery. While its fauna are still rather primitive and largely confined to the oceans, its flora is diverse. Although in many ways similar to Earth plants, Argenta flora are clearly in the early stages of evolution. With no sizable herbivores and well oxygenated atmosphere, it is a lush, verdant world, blanketed by sprawling forests. Despite its wild climate and irregular days (it has two suns). Argenta has a large arboreal population, and hosts a wide range of industries. Some of the bizarre plants found only here have brought new foods to the market, as well as many useful natural compounds.



WOLFRUM - This young, volcanic planet has been described by those unfortunates that live there as 'Hell's Oven'. Its geological activity makes it both rich in mineral resources, and an extremely hazardous place to live. Earth-like 1.1G gravity and 26 hour days do little to alleviate the constant danger of living on a planet riddled with active volcanoes. Rivers of molten metal, surface deposits of rare minerals and chemical lakes make prospecting here a lucrative but hazardous trade. The planets' harshness also makes Wolfrum an excellent penal colony. Its population of convicts and the very hardest UCM labourers make it an excellent recruiting ground for the Legions. A disproportionate number of Wolfrum soldiers eventually progress into the ranks of the elite Praetorians, and regard themselves as the toughest the UCM has to offer.



GOVERNMENT AND POLITICS

Broadly speaking, there are two levels of government in the UCM. Each planet has reasonable freedom to govern its own affairs, and often laws, practices and institutions vary slightly between colonies. This is deemed a sensible measure, since each planet has quite different concerns, making blanket laws unsuitable. Each planet is controlled by an elected assembly, chaired by a Planetary Governor, chosen by that assembly.

The concerns of the UCM as a whole are directed by a central government, currently based in Aurum's capital, Atlantia. The majority of this assembly consists of the UCM Senate. The number of seats held by each planet is determined by population, but every planet in the UCM has at least one seat. One of the roles of the various planetary governments is to elect these representatives. In the Senate, decisions which affect the UCM in its entirety are ratified and coordinated, which are predominantly diplomatic or military in nature. As such, the Senate plays a crucial role in directing the will of the UCM as a whole, and is largely responsible for coordinating the efforts of the colonies towards this purpose.

Major decisions, policies and directives are normally proposed by a senior institution, the UCM High Council. Each planet with a population of over 500 million people returns a representative to this body. During short, crucial sessions it is customary for the Planetary Governors themselves to take up this role. While serving, members gain the rank of High Councillor, in addition to their existing title/s. Every eight years, the Council elects a President from among its ranks. He/She immediately relinquishes all existing positions, and concentrates solely on the weighty task of serving as first among equals on the Council.

Due to the dire threats facing the UCM, military figures have a prominent presence in both the High Council and the Senate. These are chosen as representatives by their respective institutions. Also, noted industrialists and powerful businessmen hold honorary seats in the Senate, representing many concerns, and serving a crucial advisory role.

To the average citizen, the actions of distant institutions such as the High Council, Senate and even their own planetary government may seem far removed from the struggles of daily existence. Directives made thousands of light-years distant are often deemed aloof, unsympathetic or even invasive. However, the ominous threat of the Scourge is a persuasive force for cohesion which has led to strong solidarity thus far.



ALLIES AND ENEMIES

The UCM has had diplomatic relations with various Shaltari tribes since its formation. Mutually beneficial trade and agreements exist with some of the less hostile tribes, such as the Amazons, Inca and Maasai. Such groups are often pleased to conduct diplomacy where it suits them and in turn export much needed exotic materials to the UCM. However, no Shaltari tribe is entirely benevolent, and conflict has been known to occur even with the most conciliatory of them.

Other tribes, such as the Apache, Aztecs and Comanche normally treat the UCM with disdain and open aggression. Mankind has been intermittently at war with such tribes since the early days of galactic exploration, and little has changed. All Shaltari tribes can be rightly described as warlike, and as such newly encountered ones are always treated with extreme caution.

Relations with the newly emerged Post Human Republic (PHR) are no less fraught, and certainly more venomous. Ever since their actions in the Battle of Vega, those who heeded The Warning have been regarded as traitors. The fact that the UCM has arrived at its current position of strength through suffering and hardship, while the PHR has done so through clandestine prudence, immediately soured relations. With their initial delegation less than well received, future talks have failed to deliver any kind of collaboration between the two factions.



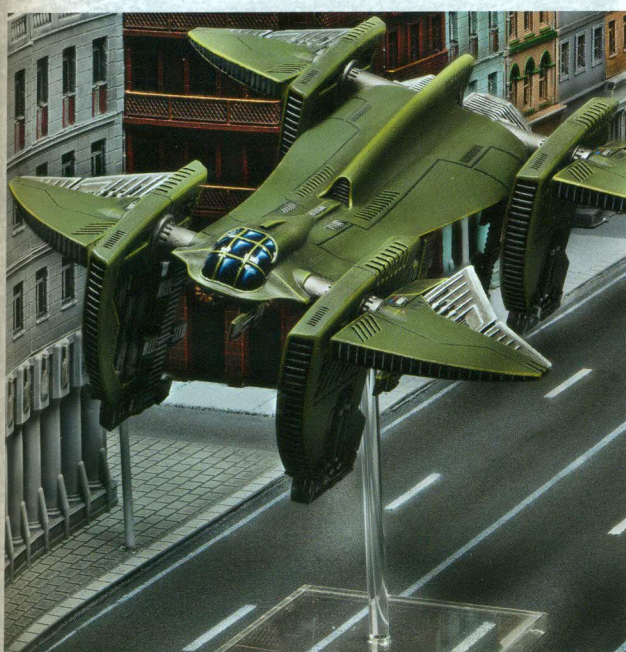
Since its revelation, the PHR has been pursuing its own shadowy agenda. This has already caused instances of armed conflict in these early days of the Reconquest, a pattern which is only likely to worsen. While many UCM commanders have at least a grudging respect for the Shaltari, a barely disguised hatred for the PHR is rife, especially amongst officers of the fleet. While the High Council is against declaring total war (rightly reasoning that one mortal enemy is enough!), localised battles are certain to occur.

Little need be said of the UCM's feelings about the Scourge. It is utterly dedicated to the eradication of the vile enemy, vowing to wipe them from the face of mankind's former heartlands. The UCM will stop at nothing to achieve this monumental goal.

MILITARY MIGHT

Despite its democratic underpinnings, the UCM is essentially a military state. This has arisen not through tyranny, but rather through necessity. Many senior army and fleet offices come automatically with Senate and even High Council seats. Most civilian politicians recognise the need for defence issues to supersede all other concerns and are firmly behind the Reconquest. The UCM has essentially been in a state of war since its very foundation.

Most UCM citizens live austere and often harsh lives, human toil being the lifeblood of the Reconquest. Most accept this with stoic determination, and hope one day to see the bountiful Cradle Worlds and even Earth itself with their own eyes. These distant jewels have a place in the heart of many who once listened in awe to their grandparents' tales of great cities, verdant gardens and lives of leisure. All understand that a free future can only be theirs through annihilating the Scourge.



Military service is seen as paramount for the survival of mankind, especially now that the Reconquest is underway. Today, over 4% of the population are mobilised - a higher percentage than at any other time in the history of humanity.

In total, the UCM has over 900 million men and women under arms. Military service is currently volunteer only, although there is constitutional provision for conscription should the need arise. However, all jobs which help the war effort, even the most humble, are lauded as honourable and necessary for the good of the species.

Broadly, the military is split into two halves, the United Colonial Army (UCMA) and the United Colonial Fleet (UCMF).

THE ARMY (UCMA)

The bulk of the UCM's enlisted manpower is to be found in its vast armies. Reconquest will be achieved not through orbital bombardment, but by boots on the ground. In recent years, massive rearmament, recruitment drives and training programmes have readied the army for this colossal task. The army itself is split into four parts:

Army Headquarters - AHQ encompasses the top levels of army leadership, as well as its communications, logistics and command centres. AHQ, and thus the army as a whole, is headed by the Supreme Marshal. In terms of personnel, AHQ is tiny compared to other facets of the army, although it fulfils many vital roles. Without AHQ, it would be impossible to coordinate and supply the UCM's immense armies both on and off the battlefield.

Army Air and Space Corps - The AASC comprises all air crew and service personnel required to fly and maintain the army's massive fleet of dropships and gunships. A vital link between the UCMF and ground units, the AASC's main role is to deliver troops planetside, extract them from combat zones, and provide close air support.

The Colonial Legions - Most foot soldiers fall under the auspices of the Legions, from the lowliest infantry grunt to the elite Praetorians. A single Legion is composed of around one million fighting men, in addition to support staff. Normally, each Legion hails from a single planet, from which it takes its name (although it may not be based there). The more populous colonies raise several Legions, indicated by Roman numerals (e.g. Ferrum XIII'th).

Colonial Armoured Corps - All ground vehicle crews, engineers and mechanics fall under the umbrella of these mighty formations. Individual Corps (around 100,000 men + vehicles) are attached to specific Legions on a more or less permanent basis and fight directly alongside them. Their main tasks are to ferry men on the ground, coordinate ground logistics, and to bring death to the enemy through epic firepower. Since most Legions are fully mechanised, even the Corps' mundane roles are vital. The Colonial Tank Battalions represent the most formidable aspects of the Armoured Corps.



THE FLEET (UCMF)

The fleet is the wings of the UCM military juggernaut. All space-borne vessels and fast aircraft are under its command. The Fleet's main task is to ferry the UCMA between battle zones, and to form an unstoppable spearhead for planetary invasions. Its low orbit Strike Carriers are at the core of Reconquest, the final springboards from which UCM ground forces are unleashed. The UCMF supports troops on the ground through deadly strikes by ground attack aircraft and in extreme cases by orbital bombardment. It is split into five parts:

Colonial Admiralty - This body comprises the highest echelons of fleet leadership, led by the Supreme Admiral. Although Fleet Command itself is based on Niccolum, the majority of Admiralty personnel are spread throughout the fleet. They are fighting leaders, and often command actions in person.

Orbital Defence Command - ODC consists of all men and material associated with static planetary defence, as well as monitor vessels. This includes military dockyards, space stations and orbital outposts. They also undertake the vital secondary role of hosting, maintaining and servicing the Colonial Battlefleets when in home ports.

The Colonial Battlefleets - The vast majority of UCMF enlisted men and women serve in the mighty Battlefleets. These include most UCMF vessels, from the smallest lighter to the most titanic of dreadnaughts. There is no set size for a single Battlefleet, and they are frequently reorganised as requirements dictate. A single Battlefleet may contain hundreds of capital ships and thousands of smaller vessels, crewed by millions of souls. They are the backbone of UCM military might, without which the Reconquest would be impossible.

Fleet Air Arm - This encompasses all air crew and service personnel required to fly and maintain the Fleet's interceptors, bombers, shuttles and support craft. It is split into three facets; Fighter Command, Strike Command and Air Logistical Corps. They are normally the Fleet's only visible presence on the battlefield, providing air support to UCMA units on the ground. The Air Arm attracts the best pilots in the entire UCM.

Colonial Marine Corps - Although tiny when compared to the Legions, the Colonial Marine Corps nevertheless consists of a significant number of fighting men. Their main task being security aboard ship; they are often called upon to repulse enemy boarding actions. They do occasionally conduct ground operations, normally in support of atmosphere capable barge Landings.

UCM TECHNOLOGY

MASS ORBITAL INSERTION

Central UCM military strategy calls for efficient, lightning fast planetary assault from space. Almost all UCM materiel has been designed with this fundamental tenet in mind, from the heaviest dropship to the humble assault rifle. All UCM constructs are lightweight, efficient, utilitarian and cost effective, facilitating en masse deployment.

Ironically, it was the blisteringly effective Scourge assault that inspired this favourite UCM tactic. During the dark hours of the invasion, human defence forces were thoroughly incapable of countering the rain of foes from on high. Determined to learn from this, UCM strategists embraced the concept of rapid deployment and redistribution of ground forces. In this way, the UCM has adapted to the realities of modern inter-planetary warfare.



MISSILE HALO

The missile halo is a collective term for a whole group of technologies, designed to render enemy long range and high altitude missiles ineffective. It comprises a collection of scanners, drones, and medium intensity lasers (airborne, spaceborne and ground). These systems detect, target and destroy all incoming munitions with ruthless efficiency. The only weapons systems able to pass the missile halo with impunity are directed energy weapons. Heavy kinetic energy orbital strikes are occasionally able to break through the halo through sheer un-explosive mass.

The missile halo is routinely deployed above all UCM combat zones, providing an excellent level of protection from long range strikes. However, similar systems are deployed by the UCM's enemies, and the presence of some sort of missile halo is assumed for all tactical planning.

The primary result of this technology is that engagements typically occur at short range. The unavailability of long range strikes makes it necessary to close with the enemy before engagement. Indeed, the missile halo can be thought of as an active countermeasures system for the entire battlefield.

VEHICLES

Modern UCM armoured vehicles are a far cry from the ungainly, lumbering contraptions of the 20th century. They are necessarily lightweight, and are protected by advanced composite armour, active countermeasures, low signatures and sheer weight of numbers.

UCM vehicles are distinctly utilitarian in appearance, with harsh lines and compact forms. A common theme in UCM tank design is an extremely low profile. This allows for maximum efficiency in transit, and presents a more difficult target to the enemy. Part of this design necessitates cramped crew compartments, where drivers often lay prone inside their machines.

The UCM's industrial powerhouse churns out armour at a staggering rate, aided by the Colonies' epic reserves of raw material. Armed with the potent weaponry, the UCM's armoured hordes are poised to deliver crushing vengeance to the Scourge, and all others who stand in their way.

Most UCM vehicles and aircraft share a common set of systems:

Armour -

Armour on UCM vehicles is far lighter than the primitive materials that once encased the armoured leviathans of Oil Age Earth. However, inch for inch, it is also much tougher, and can often shrug off powerful attacks. It consists of various layered composites, designed to absorb and dissipate the energy of impacts. Although less sophisticated, the armour of UCM vehicles is generally more effective physical protection than Scourge or Shaltari equivalents.



Crew - Most UCM vehicles feature a single driver/pilot. Advanced control systems coupled with a certain degree of automation make it possible for a single individual to operate a main battle tank. This keeps the loss of life to a minimum and makes best use of the UCM's valuable trained crewmen. The UCM shuns the use of drones in major combat capacities, as they are far too vulnerable to electronic warfare. There is also a strong feeling in AHQ that there's no substitute for the split second judgements which can only be made by a living pilot.

Imaging Scanners -

UCM vehicles make use of an extensive array of optical and electromagnetic systems to provide the crew with detailed situational awareness. Some units (such as tanks), feature no windows whatsoever, relying entirely on these systems for vision.

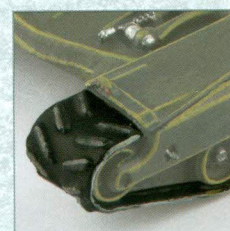


Powerplant - A whole range of technologies are utilised by the UCM to power the engines, weapons and systems of vehicles. Generally, a single powerplant serves multiple systems in anything but large aircraft.



Mankind's command of fusion technology still does not extend to miniaturisation. As such, advanced degenerate matter fuels are processed by massive reactors for use in small powerplants. Principally, hypercompressed metallic hydrogen (HMH) is used, a substance several orders of magnitude more energetic than rocket fuel. In this way, energy storage is kept compact and thus lightweight, further increasing flight and running times.

Treads - The days of segmented metal tank tracks are long gone. Today, treaded vehicles feature continuous belts of rubber-like composite,



encasing a flexible metallic fibre-web. These treads are highly resilient, and can still function with extensive battle damage. They are also over ten times lighter than traditional types.

Folding Weapons -

Many fighting vehicles feature weapons attached to movable armatures, which can be folded flush to the hull for increased transportability. These are also capable of swift movement, facilitating fast target acquisition and tracking. They can also be raised to a considerable height, allowing the vehicle to 'peek' and even fire over raised terrain whilst keeping the hull in cover.



Active Countermeasures - All UCM fighting vehicles feature a broad suite of active countermeasures. These provide effective protection against most ranged attacks, given time to acquire incoming munitions and to deploy defences. These include point defence laser arrays, sub-munitions and even local energy shield projection. These systems have a low power consumption compared to true energy shields, since they are only activated over a small area and when threats are inbound. They are however ineffective against directed energy weapons, and can be defeated by a combination of high velocity projectiles and close range attack.

WEAPONRY

UM-100 'Avenger' Railgun

- This is the UCM's premier anti-armour, kinetic energy weapon. When fired, a disc shaped, melon sized projectile is magnetically accelerated to a blistering speed. This delivers a tremendous amount of energy downrange and causes outright devastation on impact. Extended range against active countermeasure equipped targets is achieved through the projectile's staggering velocity. Its main disadvantages are high power consumption, low rate of fire and the telltale fire trails left by its projectiles. These ignite the air with their passage by sheer friction, often exposing the shooter's position.



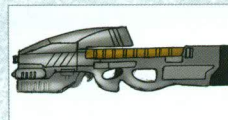
Missile Launchers -

The UCM still deploys chemically fuelled rockets in certain situations. These offer the advantages of negligible power consumption, low cost, portability and lethality on contact. However, despite recent advancements, their airspeed is still rather low, and as such they are best employed at close range and in urban environments, where they might overcome countermeasures. The UM-105 'Phoenix' provides the infantry with man-portable, anti-armour firepower while its larger, multi shot cousin (UM-105B) is utilised by light scout vehicles.



UM-3 Modular Assault

Weapon - This ubiquitous small arm was developed as the standard personal weapon of all UMA armed forces. This is a select fire, bullpup configuration, conventional firearm. It can be adapted in seconds to fulfil a wide variety of battlefield roles, with interchangeable barrel length, sights and calibres. It can be configured as a short sub-machinegun, standard assault rifle, LMG or infantry sniper rifle. It can utilise a wide variety of caseless ammunition, including armour piercing, explosive tipped, tracer, venom and fragmentation rounds.



UM-28 'Vindicator' Gatling Cannon

- This imposing firearm features a truly awe-inspiring rate of fire. Its five, rotating, 28 mm calibre barrels spit out over 5000 rounds per minute. At over 15 feet in length, it is only to be found on large vehicles. It is predominantly used in the anti-air role, where it can project a veritable hail of heavy shells towards fast moving targets. It has also been fitted to AASC gunships for use against ground targets, where a concentrated burst can shred a tank in seconds.



UM-303 'Punisher' Minigun

- A smaller version of the 'Vindicator' Gatling Cannon, the UM-303 fulfils a similar role where the larger weapon cannot be mounted. While less powerful than its big brother, it is still effective against aircraft, and murderously efficient in the anti-infantry role.



UM-40 'Retribution' Cannon

- This 40 mm cannon is one of the last heavy conventional firearms to see service in the UCMF. Quite primitive by modern standards, it nevertheless provides merciless killing power with negligible power drain at over 300 rounds per minute. However, it has a somewhat lower muzzle velocity than railguns, and must be used up close to be effective against active countermeasures.



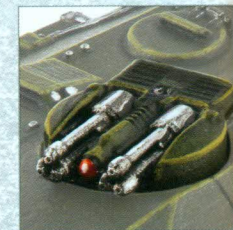
Heavy Machineguns,

various - UCM vehicles often employ one or more heavy machineguns in the close support role, the most common being the .50 calibre 'Equaliser' HMG. These simple but effective weapons provide anti-infantry firepower to a wide range of units, from tanks to dropships. These make virtually every UCM vehicle a threat to enemy infantry.



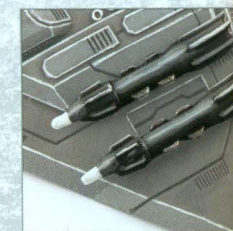
UM-5 'Vendetta' Rotary

Machinegun - The Vendetta is a triple barrelled, small calibre Gatling-type firearm. Often used in pairs, the UM-5 is the standard close defence anti-infantry weapon of AASC dropships and gunships. Normally chin-mounted, a pair of UM-5's can send murderous amounts of lead towards unfortunate targets.



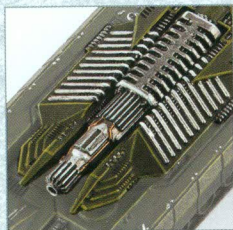
UM-85 'Sledgehammer' Bunker Buster -

These simple yet devastating guided 2,000 pound gravity munitions are optimised for the demolition of buildings. A hardened nose section gives the UM-85 the ability to penetrate over 2m of reinforced concrete before its cataclysmic detonation. It is often released at high speed and low altitude to avoid enemy missile halos. Only the most hardened structures can hope to survive the devastating result of a Sledgehammer strike.



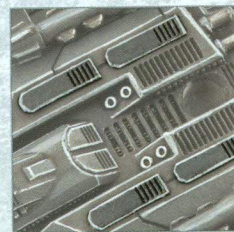
UMX-1 'Marksman'

Battlefield Laser - A recently developed experimental weapon, the UMX-1 has been rushed into service in the face of the need for long range, anti-armour support. Even railguns have a decidedly limited range against targets with active countermeasures. Not so with the Marksman, which is a directed energy weapon of extreme accuracy. Somewhat underpowered and rather inefficient compared to those of other races, the UMX-1 is still highly effective in its capacity as a tank destroyer. Its main disadvantage is its massive power consumption, coupled with low rate of fire.



UMX-2 'Heavenfire' Plasma

Cyclone - While rather primitive compared to Scourge plasma weapons, the experimental UMX-2 features the familiar level of extreme lethality. Indeed, the Heavenfire is the first practical result of the UCM's attempts



to learn from Scourge technology. It works by first generating, then releasing a torrent of plasma above a target from low altitude. On contact, the storm of superheated plasma reduces the heaviest armour to molten slag. This all-encompassing energy and lack of solid projectile makes active countermeasures utterly ineffective against its deadly touch.



UCM COLOUR SCHEMES

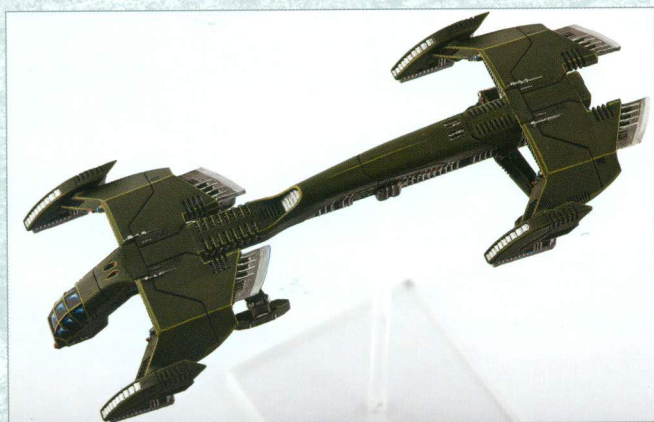
Below are some examples of typical UCM camouflage schemes. Units from particular Colonies will usually fight in whatever livery is suitable for the environment, and as such these colours bear little relation to their home colony. The Colonies are dynamic and ever changing, and as such new patterns regularly see service, so feel free to invent your own! Look to modern military vehicles for more inspiration.



UCM JUNGLE CAMO



ALPINE CAMO



STANDARD GREEN



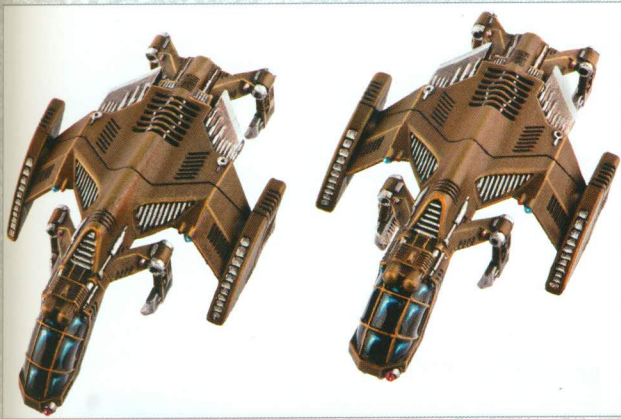
WOODLAND CAMO



SPECIAL FORCES BLACK



ARCTIC CAMO



OXIDE WASTES CAMO



BLOCK URBAN



FLEET GREY



PLAIN DESERT CAMO



TONED DESERT CAMO



PLAIN URBAN



TUNDRA CAMO



FLEET 2-TONE



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THE SCOURGE

The Scourge are foul, neuro-parasitic lifeforms which can utterly dominate an unfortunate host, bending its life to its will. They thrive on the conquest and absorption of other races, their very mode of existence as potent a threat as their formidable battlefield technology. They are the Galaxy's ultimate predators.

Their breathtaking assimilation of the central planets, including Earth itself, has made them the primary threat to the very existence of mankind. Their methods of killing on the battlefield are abhorrent to witness, but violent death at the hand of their potent plasma weaponry can be as nothing compared to the dread of being taken alive...

'PURE' SCOURGE

Outside a host, a Scourge isn't much to look upon, sickening though they undoubtedly are. Scourge adults are wispy, boneless, soft bodied creatures, frail in the extreme. Indeed, its fetid body is hard to identify amongst the myriad swirling tendrils of its extremities.

A Scourge can survive for its full lifespan without a host. It has been postulated that the Scourge evolved independently from hosts and only presented neuro-parasitic abilities late in their development. Once beyond the larval stage, in fact, it becomes impossible for a Scourge to take a host at all, and it must henceforth live as a pathetic, fragile creature for the remainder of its foul existence. It was a drive for physical improvement which ultimately led the Scourge to find strength in the bodies of other races.

Pure Scourge are obviously utterly unsuited for the open battlefield. Indeed, in gravity beyond 0.5G a Scourge cannot even move outside a liquid. Pure Scourge are however commonly found on the battlefield in control of vehicles, confirmed by studies of Scourge wrecks. Inside their unsettling and insectile war machines were found pockets of a black, tar like nutrient soup, floating inside which were pure Scourge. It seems that if larvae are not provided with a host in time, Scourge find strength in a manufactured chassis. The disturbingly predatory, organic qualities of the movements of scourge vehicles can be explained by this unholy communion of Scourge and construct, a process which is understood to be permanent.

TAKING A HOST

To live with any degree of potency, a Scourge must take a carbon-based host early in its life. How this is done remains a mystery to UCM scientists, since no man has ever seen the process and lived to tell the tale. Those few to have escaped Scourge 'breeding hives' speak of the unendurable screams and the agony of the victims, a torment understood to last for months in some cases. Externally, captured hosts retain their normal physical characteristics in the early stages of possession.

Internally however, the Scourge will have fully developed into a web of gelatinous fibres, bound to the nervous system of the host.

In a fairly short time, external symptoms become obvious. A heightened thirst, coupled with a constant sweat is the first noticeable sign of possession. Curiously, hosts lose the ability to produce colour pigment, and over time became more and more pale, the eyes eventually turning a sickly red. Their thirst and propensity to sweat also heightens with time, eventually reaching a stage where they routinely drink the blood of the fallen, comrades and enemies alike.

The Scourge prolongs the life of the host but ultimately ages itself, although it can live for several centuries. When the Scourge eventually begins to die, the host becomes increasingly erratic, as the Scourge's iron grip on its nervous system deteriorates. This causes the subject to exhibit the jerky behaviour witnessed by the Scourge's earlier hosts, the 'lizard warriors'. Eventually, the Scourge dies, closely followed by the host, wracked with apparent insanity and pain. Clearly, many 'lizard warriors' were close to death at the time of the invasion, and the Scourge had been desperate for new hosts.

Tragically, no cure has been found, and any attempt to remove the Scourge results in the death of the host. Horrifically, it is theorised that some measure of the human consciousness survives under the domination of the parasite, an existence of perpetual pain and suffering ended only by death. As the Scourge slowly dies, the wracked, inevitably insane psyche of the host begins to break through, hence the erratic behaviour exhibited in late-stage hosts.



Scourge take on any immunities to pathogens and biological agents that their host exhibits. In this way they become resistant to a planet's microbes, and are just as able to exist safely there as their host.

They use no audible sound to communicate, and it has been postulated that they use some form of telepathy, ultrasound or some other electromagnetic method of communication with other Scourge in their vicinity. This makes them virtually silent stalkers in groups, a horror faced on a regular basis by the grizzled resistance fighters, who have lived under the thrall of the Scourge their entire lives.

USURPERS BY NATURE

It has been suggested that the Scourge may be able to make use of a measure of the host's memories, an insidious and ominous prospect explaining their continued use of human structures and systems. Indeed, this can be seen as a highly efficient mode of conquest, since a ready-made environment exists amongst the host's former cities. In this way, the Scourge not only absorb the bodies, but also the technology, knowledge and power base of their vanquished prey. This goes a long way towards explaining the level of sophistication evident in Scourge technology. As the Scourge conquer, they only become more potent as the Galaxy's apex predator.

OCCUPATION

The Scourge occupation of the Cradle worlds and Earth itself has been a living nightmare for the few resistance fighters who remain. Tales have been told of the Scourge's ceaseless persecution of these poor souls, whose capture would inevitably swell the ranks of the enemy. Being taken alive is their greatest fear, and all carry cyanide capsules to bring them merciful deliverance should they be captured.

Resistance fighters have been launching daring partisan raids for over 150 years and have proven a constant (albeit minor) thorn in the side of the Scourge. Their greatest achievement has been the protection and maintenance of the archaic human Foldspace nodes, allowing UCM vessels to travel accurately to these stricken worlds.

The Scourge appear to be exploiting captured planets to the full, running all human industrial centres 24 hours a day, and often augmenting and expanding them with their own, sinisterly organic looking structures. Areas of little use to the Scourge, such as the once thriving entertainment and cultural centres have been left to rot, leading to eerie vistas of beautiful buildings reclaimed by nature.

LEADERSHIP

How the Scourge are directed is a complete mystery. Some sort of highly effective command and control system must be in place (given the breathtaking organisation and purpose of the invasion). There are many theories, but little concrete evidence. It is a Priority-One objective of Reconquest Phase-One to identify the Scourge leadership mechanism and caste, so that they can be targeted and eliminated.

On the ground, the Scourge appear to have a system of officers and commanders in a similar manner to most fighting forces. Top level battlefield command almost invariably seems to come from larger Scourge constructs, since the destruction of these often results in a breakup of organisation. A form of tactical leadership has been witnessed among individuals within Scourge warrior Squads, although the mechanisms are poorly understood, since Scourge make no apparent verbal communications.



SCOURGE TECHNOLOGY

INVADERS

The Scourge are masters of planetary invasion. Their entire fighting system is geared towards this single-minded goal. Their dropships are strictly one-way transports, deploying from low orbit in freefall and only capable of sustained powered flight at relatively low altitudes. Sinister grav-tanks can deploy from these peculiar, vertically configured craft in seconds, reaching the combat zone faster than those of all other races, save the Shaltari. Their weapons are short ranged, but spectacularly destructive. Their entire ethos demands lightning speed, intense shock and merciless aggression. The Scourge do not know retreat, they either conquer, or die trying.

VEHICLES

Scourge vehicles are instantly recognisable, disturbing to look upon and invariably sinister in nature. Their sleek, predatory, suggestively insectile forms have become waking nightmares to the forces of humanity.

Scourge construct technology is only vaguely understood by UCM military scientists, although the level of understanding grows with every engagement against the hated foe. Scourge technology is certainly more readily comprehensible than that of the enigmatic Shaltari. It is understood that most Scourge vehicles share a common set of systems:

Biomechanical Exoskeleton -

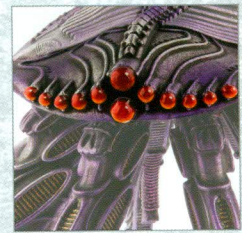
Despite their appearance, it has been concluded that Scourge vehicles are definitely 'made' constructs, and are not organic in the strictest sense. Vehicles of a particular class are exactly alike, a characteristic unlikely in any living entity. However, biological compounds are rife in the composite bodies of these nightmarish war machines. It has been theorised that Scourge vehicles are 'grown' to some degree, although any concrete knowledge still eludes researchers. The technology certainly provides a well armoured shell, virtually impervious to small arms fire and far exceeding the strength of Colonial equivalents in relation to weight.



Pilot - All Scourge vehicles appear to have a living pilot, a pure Scourge. This frail creature is always protected within the depths of the machine, suspended in a black, tar like nutrient soup. It is likely that the pilot is bonded to the machine for life, lending the movements of the vehicle an unsettlingly organic quality.

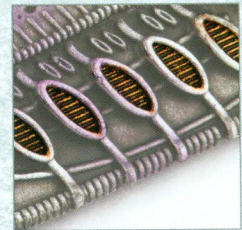
Compound Ocular Systems -

Most Scourge vehicles get their view of the world through a series of bizarre compound scanners, which appear to resemble rows of baleful eyes. Often brightly coloured, these instruments are unlike anything witnessed by man, and provide excellent wide field vision in virtually all conditions. These eyes form an optical network, providing the pilot with a 'sense' of their entire surrounding environment across multiple spectra. Redundancies are built into this network, as it appears that it functions well enough after extensive damage.



Power Core -

A total mystery to UCM scientists, Scourge power cores invariably collapse when constructs are destroyed, leaving only a molten pile of slag behind. Low levels of residual radiation tend not to indicate a fission source, but rather some kind of limited fusion reactor. Whatever the true nature of this technology, its potency cannot be denied.



Mass Repulsion Drive -

The majority of Scourge vehicles sinisterly glide over the battlefield in a manner popularly known as 'anti-grav'. More accurately, it appears to be a kind of 'mass-phobic' drive, which functions only when close to a solid or liquid body. It is theorised that Scourge aircraft stay aloft in a similar manner, although power consumption seems to increase exponentially with altitude, leading to limited flight times. Aircraft dropping for orbit do so in freefall, and only activate their drives when approaching ground level. Vehicles which generally hover only a few feet above the ground, such as grav-tanks, have much more efficient, smaller drives and can remain active for days without refuelling.



Plasma Thrusters -

The standard propulsion method of Scourge atmospheric vehicles. Thrust is generated by expelling superheated plasma from the core at high velocity. These are relatively underpowered compared to chemical thrusters, but are only required for changes in velocity and to overcome air resistance. They can be utilised as long as the core functions, and can be run in reverse for braking.



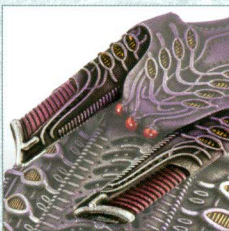
Active Countermeasures - All Scourge vehicles utilise active countermeasures, which are in many ways similar to those employed by UCM forces, although they operate more efficiently.

Passive Countermeasures - Some Scourge vehicles also employ all-encompassing, passive energy shields. They do not appear to be as advanced as those employed by the Shaltari, since their use is restricted to large vehicles.

WEAPONRY

Scourge firepower is undoubtedly as devastating as it is horrific. Their weapons are optimised to cause unprecedented slaughter at short range, bringing agonising death to those who dare oppose them. The speed and aggression of Scourge attacks brings these nightmares into range quickly, where often the only means of survival is frantic retreat.

Plasma Cannons - These fearsome guns represent the core of Scourge anti-armour firepower. A single blast from one of these merciless destroyers can reduce a main battle tank to molten wreckage, instantly immolating its crew to ash. Each plasma bolt contains a solid core, around which is suspended a ball of super-energetic white-blue plasma. On contact, the vast, writhing energies of the plasma are dissipated into the target, causing horrific damage.



Compared to simple kinetic energy weapons, the range of these fearsome weapons is thankfully limited by the ability of the powered core to contain the plasma. The plasma cannon's limited absolute range and relatively low velocity is however offset by its ability to defeat all known forms of active countermeasures. This is because the solid core cannot usually be accurately located or indeed destroyed behind its shell of burning energy.

Plasma Rifles - These are the primary small arm utilised by Scourge infantry. In many ways, they function as miniaturised versions of the plasma cannon. The effect they have on living tissue is profoundly shocking to behold. With a much higher velocity and rate of fire than the plasma cannon, plasma rifle ammunition usually penetrates the target before energy dissipation, which is subsequently immolated from the inside out. Injuries from these weapons are horrific, and almost always fatal. Their effect on morale cannot be underestimated, and men of the Colonial Legions have been trained to expect such horrors - something easier said than done when your comrades are cooked in an instant around you!



Plasma Hoses -

A more primitive branch of Scourge plasma weapons technology, the plasma hose is a short ranged arced beam of plasma, contained by a charged liquid stream. These weapons have a predictably short range, but are still devastating to both armour and infantry. Generally of small size, these are commonly utilised as short range defence weapons on non-offensive units, such as small dropships.



Arc Caster -

This is the primary anti-air weapon utilised by the Scourge, and is totally dissimilar to their ubiquitous plasma weapons. The Arc Caster projects crackling tendrils of highly energised ions. These latch onto isolated solid objects (such as aircraft) with great ease, making them by far the most accurate anti-air weapon ever witnessed by man.



However, this mode of attack makes them virtually useless against ground targets, where the arc often fails to distinguish between them and harmless scenic features.

Acid Streamer - The Acid Streamer is a specialised anti-infantry weapon, and surely the most frightening yet encountered by UCM infantry. A simple pressure hose in design, the Streamer projects a noxious, highly acidic liquid towards biological targets, dissolving them to sludge in seconds. Once on the ground, the vile liquid quickly evaporates into a deadly miasma, choking and asphyxiating anything that lives. This nightmarish weapon has seen extensive use in building clearance, and functions in a similar way to the flamethrower, albeit with even more repulsive results.



Ion Storm Generator -

Of all Scourge weapons, this is perhaps the most outlandish, and certainly the most formidable. The Generator is able to bathe a wide area of the battlefield in utter chaos. It does this by creating a high energy ion storm in its immediate vicinity, bringing indiscriminate desolation to all unfortunate enough to be touched by its lethal tendrils. Being so imprecise, it is normally unleashed away from the bulk of Scourge forces to prevent unintentional friendly fire.

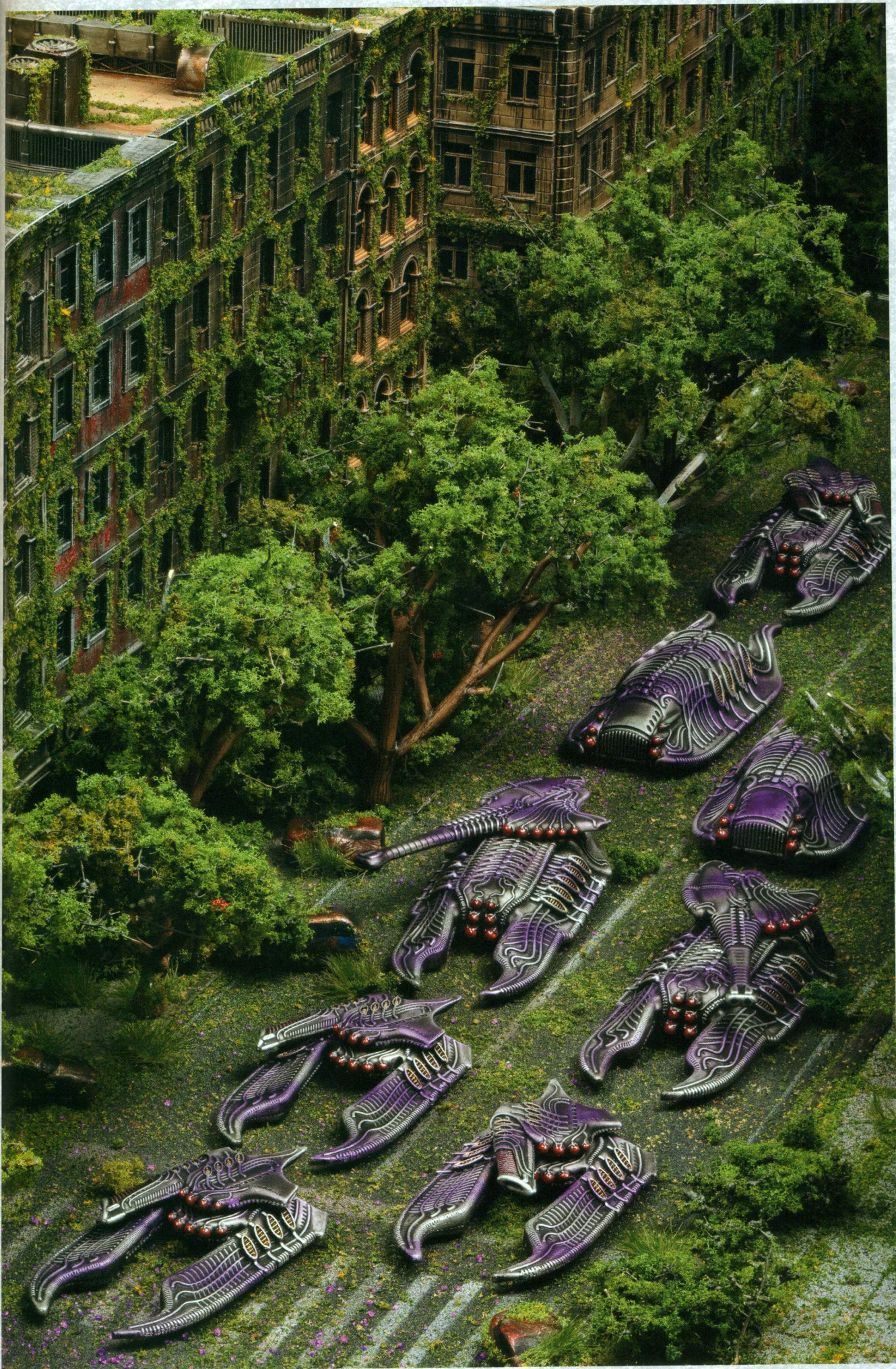


INFANTRY

Scourge Warriors - Captured human hosts now make up the majority of Scourge infantry. They continue to make use of many structures and systems created by humanity, and can utilise any machine that an ordinary man can, making them particularly effective usurpers of human planets. They are just as easily killed as ordinary men however (albeit with a somewhat higher pain threshold). They are occasionally seen wielding human weapons, although most commonly they are equipped with the fearsome Scourge Plasma Rifle.

Living Weapons - Humans are not the only species to have been assimilated by the Scourge. Other life forms are occasionally seen, some more sinister than others. Since the Scourge have a finite lifespan, it is theorised that these creatures are bred specifically as hosts by the Scourge, who for one reason or another decided not to let the species die out entirely. Usually, this is the case with life forms with special abilities and uses. The most numerous example are the terrifying 'Razorworms', 50ft long merciless predators, able to clear structures with ease, eviscerating all unfortunate souls within. These horrific creatures were initially thought of as the ravings of the few lucky enough to survive their onslaught during the invasion. The existence of these nightmares has since been confirmed, lending new terrors to entering dark structures. Who knows what other terrors the Scourge may have in store...





SCOURGE - UNITS

SCOURGE COLOUR SCHEMES

Below are some examples of typical Scourge colour schemes. The UCM is yet to comprehend any theme behind the colours of Scourge vehicles, which vary considerably between armies! Of all the races, the Scourge have the most flexibility and capacity for inventiveness when it comes to colour. Anything from organic tones to stark metallic finishes work well. A good source of inspiration is the natural camouflage patterns used marine creatures, although you could equally find ideas in neon-lit cities!



DARK WITH ENGINE GLOW



COPPER OXIDE



MULTICOLOURED



RAYSKIN



METALLIC EMERALD



BRASS



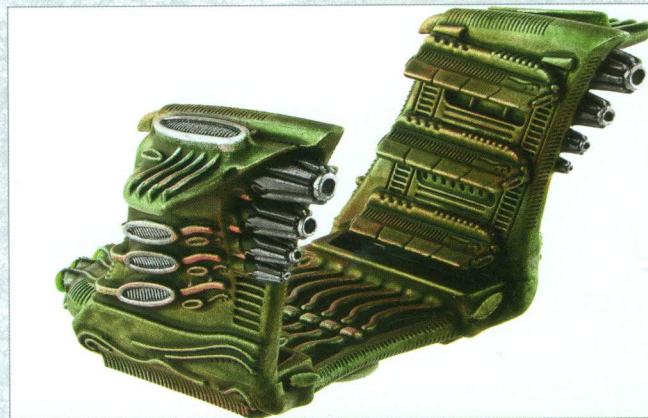
METALLIC PURPLE



METALLIC BLUE



RED CHROME



GREEN CHROME



RED SHARK SKIN



SWAMP METAL



BLUE SHARK SKIN



DARK PEARL



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THE POST-HUMAN REPUBLIC

A tiny portion of humanity turned its back on mankind in the waning days of the last Golden Age. Over one and a half centuries later, the PHR has emerged from the shadows as an unrecognisable civilisation, its people irrevocably changed. They are no longer simple human beings, they are post-humans - cyborgs.

A society no more than three billion strong, the PHR is a nation of elites, each individual more than a match for several lesser mortals. With remarkable speed, they have made technological advancements surpassing those of the UCM. Since its fiery birth, the PHR has been guided by the enigmatic White Sphere, a mysterious object of immense power. It is treated by the people of the PHR with a reverence bordering on worship.

BIRTH

As has been recounted at length elsewhere, the PHR was born through division, fire and death. Heeding the warning provided by the White Sphere, a tide of convinced souls abandoned Earth and the Cradle worlds to their prophesised fate. In order to make good their escape, they chose to fire upon the fleet sent to stop them. This provided a chance for the majority of their armada to jump into the unknown darkness of space. Their faith in The Warning spared them the horrors of the Scourge invasion, and resulted in the seeding of a new society.

EMERGENCE

Beyond the Battle of Vega, the fate of those who escaped remained utterly unknown until the eve of the UCM's ambitious Reconquest campaign. A strange and unlooked for ship suddenly appeared over Aurum, containing a delegation from the self declared Post-Human Republic. This mystifyingly changed yet humanlike group, entered an audience with the UCM High Council, and avowed their nature as descendants of the Abandonist movement.



Early relations with the UCM were understandably soured by the actions of the Republic's forefathers. In this well documented meeting, the PHR delegation refused to show remorse for their actions in the Battle of Vega, only sorrow at the extensive loss of life. The PHR has always considered those actions necessary, and hails the men and women who made them as heroes of the Republic.

Why the Republic has suddenly elected to reveal itself to the wider Galaxy is unknown. Most UCM analysts refused to accept the PHR's offer of advice, since they view a state founded entirely on apparent self interest to be beyond trust.

In spite of the PHR attempts to show the UCM that their purposes are not selfless, any accord between the two states is impossible at present.

The Republic is clearly adept at extreme subterfuge, espionage and concealment, since it evidently had deep foreknowledge of the UCM and its policies. Indeed, it is believed that until recently, the PHR was even hidden from the far reaching gaze of the Shaltari. As such, its people give little away willingly about their mysterious society. Aside from their common roots, the UCM know far less about the PHR than it does of the Scourge or even the Shaltari.



What knowledge UCM has acquired in the brief time since the PHR's emergence is incomplete at best, and more often pure conjecture. Most has been gleaned through frosty diplomatic relations and interrogations. In these few short months, the UCM acquired a number of prisoners and bodies for autopsy, since armed conflict has already erupted between the two factions. The techniques applied to extract information from subjects are, euphemistically, referred to as 'experimental'. As such, little certainty can be attached to the garbled and often incoherent responses of those under questioning.

THE WHITE SPHERE

The few certainties about this enigmatic object's physical nature can be found in the rare, antique EAA Science Division records fortunate enough to have survived the Scourge holocaust. Physically, it is known to be flawlessly white, apparently metallic, and about the size of a tennis ball. Its weight is staggering for its size, requiring the strength of three men to lift it. This crude summary represents the extent of UCM intelligence. More detailed records may await discovery on Earth and the Cradle Worlds, should the Reconquest succeed.

Its technological powers are undoubtedly tremendous. Tales of the days before the coming of the Scourge recount how it was able to decode and defeat the firewalls of every computer system on an entire sub-continent in a matter of seconds. From this, it has been theorised that the Sphere utilised the vast bandwidth it had unlocked to download inconceivable amounts of intelligence. This could possibly account for its eerie familiarity with humanity.

It is even possible that its mysterious removal from the research facility was orchestrated by itself. A popular theory maintains that it had hacked bank accounts, stolen funds, and used them to pay mercenaries to liberate itself. Sadly, it's doubtful that the UCM will even know of its true movements from the moment it was taken by force.

It's acquisition of knowledge about the coming Scourge invasion is also a subject for conjecture. Many surmise that with every computer in South America in its grip, it would have been able to tap into the EAA's extensive listening posts. Perhaps it saw something there that humans missed. Others point out the all too coincidental timing of its arrival. Some assert that it was planted by the Scourge to sow fear, division and uncertainty, softening up Earth's defences. While this undoubtedly was the case, most disregard the idea, since the White Sphere bears no resemblance to Scourge technology, and must in any case be far more advanced.

Today, the White Sphere is apparently central to the entire ethos of the Republic. Initially, it appeared that it commanded the Republic directly. However, new evidence suggests that it can only give advice, and that direct orders must be issued by those elected to interpret its council. The world 'Republic' should have indicated a democratic system from the outset of course, although the choice of language utilised by ambassadors certainly indicated subservience.

Either way, the Sphere occupies a revered and crucial position in the Republic, determining much of its policies. It is almost certain that a good measure of the PHR's evident technological superiority can be attributed to the Sphere's apparently benevolent influence. The Republic has morphed from a desperate collection of mutineers and refugees into an unrecognisable society in less than 170 years, a feat only attainable with

considerable aid. The question of motive is obvious, but theories here are too wild to justify putting down in record. For now, the White Sphere remains the greatest enigma to trouble the UCM.

POST-HUMANS

From the earliest encounters with citizens of the Republic, their 'changed' nature was instantly noticeable. While clearly human, their appearance, speech, movements and mannerisms were somehow uncanny and certainly disquieting. Their claim to being more than simply human was never in doubt from the moment it was voiced.

An immediate visual sign of this change was the occasional flash of silver from below the skin of some individuals. On closer inspection, their complexions were all too perfect and their eyes more piercing than the average person, often in hues seldom seen in nature.



Early research indicates extensive use of cybernetic prosthetics and modification, both for the purposes of injury repair and for improved physical performance. These artificial additions vary from simple bone and limb replacements to incomprehensibly advanced bio-artificial melding of living tissue and fabricated nanostructures. However repugnant this sounds, subjects appear at the height of physical perfection, despite the aforementioned gnawing feelings of 'difference' engendered to all who look upon them. Most UCM citizens who have witnessed them in person regard them as abhorrent and unnatural, a virtually distinct species to their own.

Whilst no two individuals present identical levels of enhancements, it appears that each derive substantial benefit from them. Subjects have demonstrated improved mental aptitude and endurance, increased speed, agility and strength coupled with superior vision. While grievous wounds are just as fatal to them as to ordinary men, merely debilitating injuries are seemingly ignored with impetuous ease, indicating a conscious control of the pain response.

They also appear able to easily commune with their technology, commanding total control with the lightest gesture and often with no perceptible input whatsoever. A deep empathy is also observed with others of their kind; a connection resembling the psychic at close distances. This is unmistakably electromagnetic in nature, as such abilities fail in EM shielded test chambers.



THE BINDING

The integration of these diverse artificial systems requires a complex web of connections to both each other and the organic systems of the patient. Current wisdom suggests that this is achieved through a network of advanced nanomachines binding to relevant biological aspects of the subject.

Hypnosis of prisoners, coupled with more 'esoteric' interrogation methods, has revealed a certain amount about this process. It is clearly the first stage in abandoning simple humanity in favour such an unnatural existence. This process is known to the people of the PHR as 'The Binding', and appears to have the additional significance of an initiation right or coming of age. The process seems to require no more than a single injection of nanomachines. Although a period of several days of inebriation follows, it is understood to be quite painless.

Only those who are 'Bound' are regarded as full citizens, and from that time on are known as post-humans. They can then explore the multitudes of artificial enhancements available to PHR citizens, working on their bodies as an engineer might tinker with a race car.

FAMILIARS

Most post-humans are augmented with a sophisticated neural-linked communications suite, and as such can commune with artificial intelligences known as Familiars. These devices take a wide variety of forms, from small domestic robots to personal transports and are central to the operation of the entire PHR. Developing affinity to them is considered a vital skill which can only be learned through years of practice. The most accomplished practitioners can communion with dozens of such AI's simultaneously, massively enhancing their own potency.

ELITE ARMIES

The population of the PHR is estimated to be less than one sixth of that of the UCM. In order to be effective as a fighting force, the PHR concentrates on maximising the survivability and lethality of every unit. With superior technology and artificial enhancements at its disposal, the Republic has proven highly successful in this field.

Since the PHR seemingly has no short term desire to recapture Earth and the Cradle worlds, it has no need of a vast military machine such as that of the UCM. Without this necessity, the Republic has been able to focus on providing a matchless quality of training and equipment to its few troops. Almost always outnumbered, PHR forces have already demonstrated that they can hold their own against terrible odds. Man for man, the UCMA is no match for the Republic's finest.

Little is known of the command structure of the armies of the Republic; however, it seems reasonable to assume that it follows a similar chain of command and force organisation to UCM counterparts, since each share a common heritage. Terms such as 'Division', 'Battalion' and 'Squad' are in regular use with the PHR, although it seems certain that no military formations exist which are as vast as the Colonial Legions.

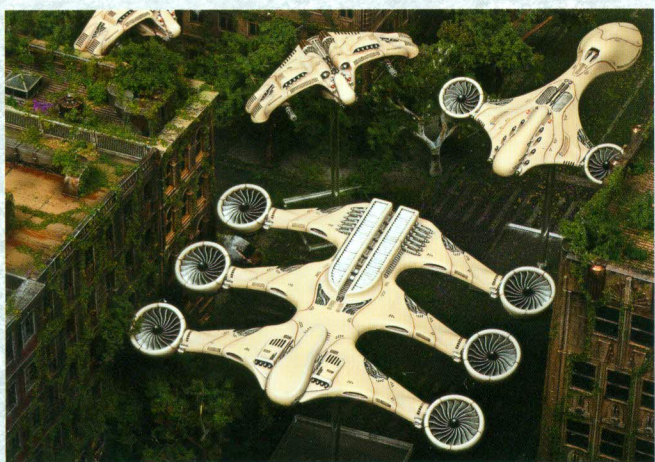


THE GRAND FLEET

All PHR warships are highly advanced, featuring many new and arcane technologies not yet seen on UCM vessels. The PHR philosophy of making every life and unit count on the battlefield has extended to fleet actions. Although complex, PHR ships can withstand far more punishment than their UCM counterparts, and are able to function with much smaller crews.

Even less is known of the Republic's fleets than its armies however, since to date they have preferred hit and run tactics to open battle. Naval strategists surmise that the Republic Grand Fleet is barely deserving of the title, estimating that it possesses under one tenth of the UCMF's compliment of capital ships. Despite this, its vessels have displayed impressive firepower and extreme durability in the rare protracted engagements thus far.

A key advantage possessed by all PHR ships is Nodeless Foldspace drives. These allow Republic vessels to jump to any coordinates with almost total accuracy from virtually any distance, an ability only demonstrated previously by the highly developed Shaltari. It is believed that this was the very first advancement granted by the White Sphere, which imparted this incredible advantage to existing drives simply by hacking and modifying their operating code. This allowed them to escape the Battle of Vega to parts unknown. All efforts to understand or reverse engineer captured drives have proven fruitless, as the code degenerates at the slightest investigation.



HOME SOIL

Where the White Sphere led the seed population of the PHR after the Battle of Vega is a complete enigma. Ambassadors have talked in guarded language of 'home soil', implying that the Republic occupies at least one planet. However, all attempts to determine locations or details have failed.

Many assume that these worlds are at least of equal quality to the Cradle Worlds or even Earth itself, since the White Sphere has demonstrated remarkable insight. Talk of utopian planets of unrivalled beauty and utility is common, although such speculation is considered dangerously distracting to the weighty task of Reconquest.

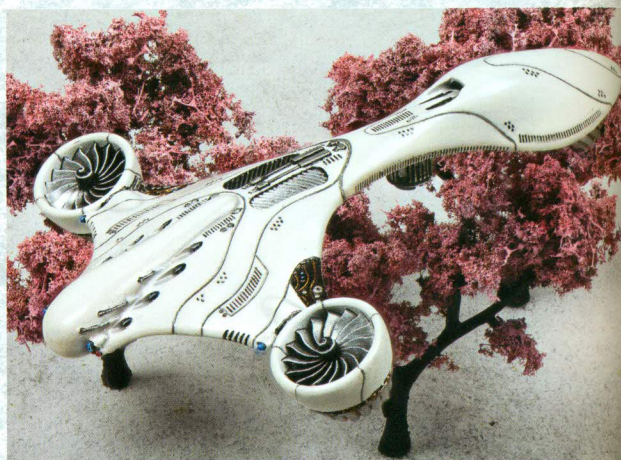


RECENT ACTIONS

In the few brief months since the PHR revealed itself to the wider Galaxy, it has been virtually impossible to ascertain its purposes. Many actions undertaken by its diplomats, armies and fleets have appeared contradictory, often inexplicable and rarely consistent. It has been assumed that some higher design must be at work, but so far any motives are elusive.

It is no secret that diplomatic overtures have been made to many Shaltari tribes. In dealings between such enigmatic parties, any results are bound to be clouded to UCM observers. It has been noted, however, that violent confrontations between PHR and Shaltari have already occurred, suggesting that the PHR is no more successful than the UCM at forging meaningful alliances with these most capricious of aliens.

Relations with the UCM are only a few steps away from outright war. The only task preventing this is the UCM's preoccupation with the Reconquest, which surely demands total focus by its armed forces to have any chance of success. Localised incidents of conflict between the two factions have been depressingly frequent however. Often, PHR fleets emerge from the blackness of space without warning, attack immediately before melting back into the shadows from whence they came. Many UCM commanders will happily open fire on PHR units with the slightest provocation, possessing an admittedly understandable hatred for such traitors to the species.



Citizens of the Republic have nearly as many reasons to despise the Scourge as those in UCM. While they were spared the horrors of the Scourge invasion, they were still forced to abandon their homes due to events set in motion by the hated aliens. Tales of Earth are almost as commonplace in the PHR as in the UCM, a fact often forgotten by those who claim the Republic cares little for future of the cradle of mankind. In the short term however, the PHR believes that free humanity numbers too few to directly challenge the Scourge. Despite this, they may have made several unexplained offensive sorties into Scourge territory. UCM forces have sometimes arrived at certain early objectives to find their enemy already slain, all the hallmarks indicating destruction by human weaponry.

TECHNOLOGY OF THE REPUBLIC

BATTLE WALKERS

A common sight in the Republic's armies, Battle Walkers form the core of PHR armoured might. Their imposing height of almost 20 feet allows them to imperiously survey and dominate the battlefield, while crushing the twisted wreckage of their foes underfoot. In line with PHR military doctrine, Battle Walkers are powerfully built and able to absorb punishing fire which would pulverise lesser vehicles.

Battle Walkers have existed in human armies for centuries. However, these experimental war machines were expensive, cumbersome and hard to control. While it is not beyond the scope of the UCMA to develop walkers, AHQ has deemed the costs unacceptable. Instead, it concentrates on proven, traditional tank designs, which can be produced in vast quantities. The PHR has no such requirements for such weight of numbers. Its superior technologies, coupled with a belief in the greater potential of walkers, has led to their adoption as its premier fighting unit.



Each Battle Walker features an isolated AI core, an entity which forms a close bond with the living pilot, leading to a potent man-machine blend. Through a deep affinity with their mount's Familiar, skilled pilots are able to guide their walker over rough terrain with unthinking ease and predatory poise.

A terrifying sight to their foes, a squadron of battle walkers is able to dominate the battlefield in a way few other units can match. Their superior mobility and elevated fighting position makes them a threat in virtually any environment, and their extreme toughness more than makes up for their increased visibility.

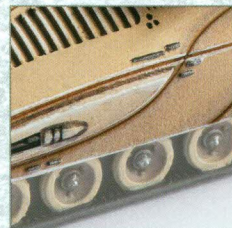
VEHICLES

In many respects, PHR vehicles are very similar to those of the UCM. Both groups share common heritage, although PHR armoured units have evolved quite differently to their counterparts. Technological advancements and higher build quality generally make them superior in most respects. Well armed, they are often outnumbered, but seldom outgunned.

The most obvious difference is the presence of the imposing battle walkers, coupled with a cleaner, more developed aesthetic. The Republic still makes use of traditional treaded vehicles however, and shares broadly similar troop delivery and extraction methods, supported by a series of dropships. These are larger and more powerful than their UCM equivalents, supporting the delivery of heavier loads to the combat zone.

Most PHR vehicles and aircraft share a common set of systems:

Armour - PHR armour is in principle almost identical to that used in the UCM. A system of layered composites provides outstanding lightweight protection. However, PHR patterns are considerably more complex and costly, utilising advanced nanostructures. Republic vehicles also gain additional durability through the simple expedient of using thicker armour. This makes them the most physically durable frontline units yet encountered by humanity.

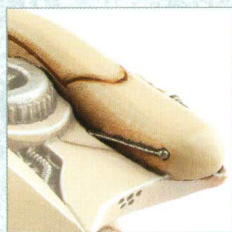


Crew - Most PHR vehicles feature a single driver/pilot. In communion with a counterpart AI, it is usual for a single individual to control most vehicles. This keeps loss of life to a minimum, and makes best use of the PHR's limited manpower. This unity and control requires decades of experience as a post-human to be effective, as such, most crew (save all but the most naturally gifted) tend to be older individuals.

Artificial Intelligence - On the battlefield, the wireless Familiars common in civilian life are almost entirely absent. The PHR, like the UCM, regards their AI's as far too vulnerable to electronic warfare techniques, since familiars only operate effectively when connected to attuned minds. However, all PHR vehicles with a living pilot are equipped with neural connections that require physical contact. Their isolated onboard AI's provide tactical assistance in combat, including targeting and threat analysis, further enhancing the effectiveness of the pilot-machine union.

Imaging Scanners - PHR

vehicles make use of an extensive array of optical and electromagnetic systems to provide the crew with detailed situational awareness. These are far superior to UCM types, their most distinctive feature being prominent EM scanning domes. Most units feature no windows whatsoever, relying entirely on these systems for vision.



Powerplant - PHR

power generators do not seem to have advanced much beyond the level of the UCM. Although certainly featuring incremental improvements across the board, they are very similar in design. Micro-fusion generators are still clearly the preserve of advanced alien races only.



Treads - PHR

vehicle tracks are the same style as those of the UCM, being continuous belts of rubber-like composite, encasing a flexible metallic fibre-web. These treads are highly resilient, as they can still function with extensive battle damage, and are over ten times lighter than traditional types.



Gyro and Servo Arrays -

Battle Walkers require a vastly complex web of systems to enable fluid movements and stable mobility. Considerable redundancy is built into these advanced constructs, allowing them to function in the face of heavy battle damage. This makes battle walkers slow and expensive to construct, although cost never seems to be an issue with PHR forces.



Active Countermeasures - All PHR vehicles utilise active countermeasures, which are in many ways similar to those employed by UCM forces, although they operate somewhat more efficiently.

WEAPONRY

PHR gunnery is highly dangerous, and demands the respect of its adversaries. A diverse array of specialist weapons are employed by mixed discipline frontline units. These provide unmatched flexibility in the face of uncertain circumstances, allowing the usually smaller PHR forces to adapt dynamically in fluid combat situations and to have the firepower to meet any threat.

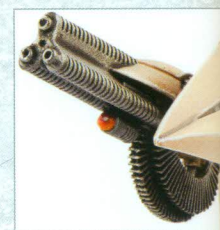
RX-1 'Firehammer'

Railgun - This is the PHR's premier anti-armour, kinetic energy weapon. The RX-1 functions in exactly the same manner as UCM railguns, although it is able to achieve a similarly staggering muzzle velocity with a shorter barrel. PHR types also differ in that they utilise more conventional cylindrical shaped projectiles, yet they achieve equally devastating results.



RX-1R 'Skybane' Rail

Repeater - The PHR has developed railguns capable of a high rate of fire, creating an entirely new branch of magnetic weapons technology. These fearsome weapons are normally employed in the anti-air role, where the reduced muzzle energy caused by their much smaller calibre is offset by weaker aircraft armour. Their triple barrels pump out a total of over 5000 rounds per minute. This is much lower than Gatling-type weapons, although each round travels at a much higher velocity, both increasing effective range and killing power.



RX-666 'Hellblaze'

Flamethrower -

A remarkably primitive weapon compared to its stalemates, the Hellblaze is nonetheless extremely effective at expunging enemy infantry from structures and cover. Soldiers have trembled in fear at the prospect of flamethrower attack for thousands of years, and for good reason. Advanced high temperature fuels only add its potential of murderous slaughter.



RXs-120 'Obliterator' 120mm Cannon -

A conventional large calibre smoothbore cannon, the Obliterator serves mainly as a demolition weapon, able to level structures with withering sustained fire. Its relatively low muzzle velocity gives it a short effective range against active countermeasures, although it can still be devastating when employed in the confines of urban combat. It has a much higher rate of fire and far lower energy consumption than railguns, making it ideal for the role for which it was designed.



RX-90 'Huntsman' 90mm Cannon -

A smaller cousin to the RXs-120, the Huntsman is also a conventional cannon. Firing at a higher velocity, it is optimised for the anti-armour role, although its lack of



power restricts its usefulness against the heaviest targets. Like all cannons, it features extremely low power consumption, making it an excellent auxiliary weapon.

RX-1000 'Sunspear' Battlefield Laser -

The PHR's only battlefield directed energy weapon appears to be significantly more advanced than the UCM's experimental 'Marksman' laser. Although slightly more powerful, its major improvement is a reduced power drain, allowing it to be fired whilst on the move. It possesses all the advantages common to pure directed energy weapons.



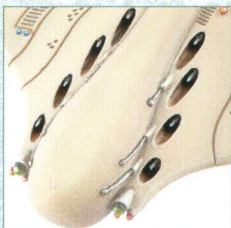
RX-20 'Exterminator' Minigun -

Unfortunately a common sight on PHR vehicles, the RX-20 is capable of laying down punishing fire, sending virtually unbroken streams of lead downrange. A consummate anti-infantry weapon, the Exterminator more than earns its name with deadly efficiency. It sees service on multiple platforms, from battle walkers to gunships.



'Shadowkiller' Stealth Missile Family -

These are advanced versions of traditional rockets unique to the PHR. A full set of concealment techniques, such as EM absorbent coatings, adaptive camouflage, thermal shielding and multi-spectra scramblers, make these projectiles difficult to detect. Such technology can, fortunately, only be used on geometrically simple objects. It gives missiles an extended range against active countermeasures, partly redressing the traditional weakness of rocket technology. These improvements come at the cost of slightly reduced lethality, since there is less space remaining for the warhead. They are fired by a wide range of inbuilt launchers, although all are effective tank-killers.



RXs-4 'Constellation' Multiple Launch Rocket System -

The largest stealth missile delivery system yet seen, the Constellation is the PHR's premier indirect fire artillery piece. Able to fire accurately at unseen targets via forward observers, this formidable system can bring down a rain of air bursting munitions on unfortunate enemies. Priority should be given to the destruction of these delivery systems before they can reap their harvest in lives.



RN-2 'Cloudspear' Stealth Cruise Missile -

The Cloudspear is a short range, isolated AI guided low ceiling strike weapon. Carried by Navy ground attack aircraft, the RN-2 is brought to low altitude and within close proximity of the target before release. This, coupled with the aforementioned stealth technology gives it a good chance of reaching its target without being intercepted by the enemy's missile halo. Due to its brief engine burn, the Cloudspear is able to carry a massive warhead for its size. As such, it is often employed against large war engines or structures, where its devastating power can be fully utilised.



RXp-57 'Dragon' Autosensing Personal Weapon -

The RXp-57 is an electronic, variable rate firearm. This assault rifle is standard issue to most PHR soldiers. It is equipped with a full neuro-linked sensor suite, giving the cyborg operator a 'gun's eye view'. This link seems to require nothing more than physical contact with the weapon's grip. It allows the weapon to be fired from the hip or in other unconventional ways, such as around corners and from positions of cover without exposing the head. It has no trigger, since discharge and rate of fire is controlled entirely by the mind. Ammunition is belt fed from a backpack, allowing the wielder to lay down continuous fire, greatly increasing survivability when outnumbered. Cased ammunition is used to ensure reliable operation during belt feeding.



RXp-14 'Longreach' Autosensing Anti-Materiel Rifle -

This squad level, man portable support weapon serves the dual roles of vehicle hunter and sniper rifle. Using special depleted uranium high velocity ammunition, it is able to deliver considerable energy for its size. It can achieve vehicle kills through its extreme accuracy, targeting weak spots (such as joints) in armour. Its use as a sniper rifle is well documented, and kills have been reported at distances of over two miles.



RXp-44 'Slayer' HV-Magnum Pistols - These are only carried by elite Siren Corps operatives. Always dual wielded, the autosensing 'naildrivers' provide the skilled user with three sets of vision, giving superb situational awareness. Virtually useless on the open battlefield, their small size, low weight and massive stopping power make them excellent CQB weapons, where their low range isn't an issue.



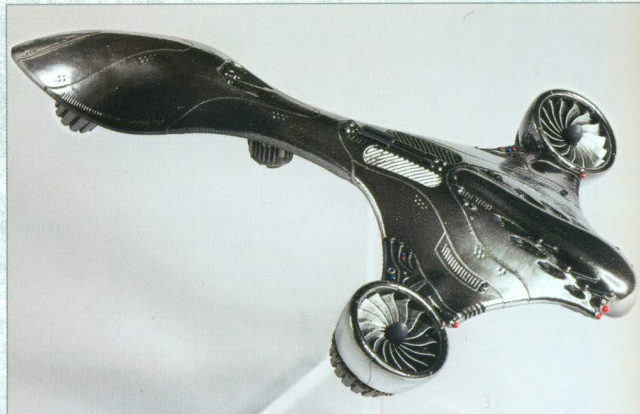
IMPERIAL GUARD - UNITS

PHR COLOUR SCHEMES

Below are some examples of typical PHR camouflage schemes. Much like the UCM, these are usually chosen for their suitability for the environment and appear to bear no relation to their planet of origin. However, more exotic colour schemes have already been observed in combat, most notably a stark and glossy white as well as shining bare metal. PHR vehicles are suited to a wide range of colour schemes and aren't limited to military style camo.



DESERT CAMO



BARE METAL



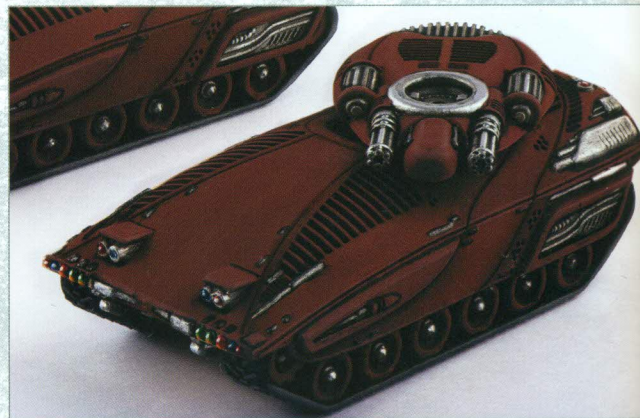
EQUATORIAL WOODLAND



JUNGLE CAMO



DESERT SHADE



OXIDE DESERT



ARCTIC FOREST



TWO-TONE



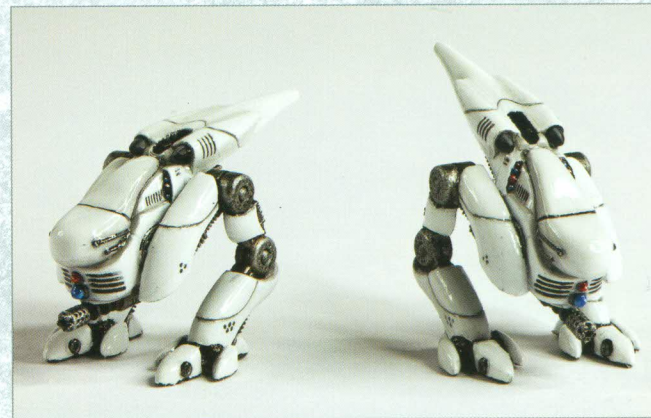
URBAN SINGLE SHADE



URBAN CAMO



WINTER FOREST



WHITE GLOSS



TEMPERATE WOODLAND



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THE SHALTARI

TRIBES

The Shaltari are an ancient and highly developed species. Their technology is advanced to a level of sophistication rivalled only by its potency. They have traversed the stars for millennia, learned myriad truths, and have fought countless wars. Through their knowledge, the Shaltari transcend even death itself, and can endure indefinitely, perceiving the ebb and flow of time like no other race.

In battle, the Shaltari are fearsome adversaries. Their swiftness is unmatched, their firepower unequalled, their bravery undeniable. The beauty of their constructs belies their true nature; engines of death, honed to lethal perfection long before humanity learned to throw stones. They are peerless masters of technology.

PHYSIOLOGY

Shaltari are diminutive in stature, standing a little over four feet high. They are roughly humanoid, although disproportionately long-limbed. They are covered from head to foot in long, thick spines, the colour of which can be changed at will. Waves of complex patterns can be broadcast at bewildering speed, a trait which has been likened to cuttlefish on Earth. Despite this, individuals do present a 'dominant' colour for the majority of the time, believed to be linked to complex psychological conditions.

Shaltari have large, ovoid eyes. Unlike human eyes, these appear opaque and lack pupils. Despite this, their vision is broadly equivalent to that of humans. A Shaltari has no discernable nose or ears, although a small mouth is visible, lined with short, sharp teeth.

They move with an unnatural and disquieting grace, although they can be faster than humans when pressed. Each movement appears flawlessly coordinated, and is always accomplished with perfection and economy. In short, Shaltari normally seem in perfect control of their bodies, their physical actions reaching a level of precision unattainable even by mankind's premier martial artists.

THE ENDURING CONSCIOUSNESS

The natural life of a Shaltari is believed to exceed three centuries. Like all known lifeforms, biological mortality eventually sets in, bringing old age and death. This loss of education, expertise and experience was mourned deeply by the early Shaltari, a race which has always valued knowledge above all things. This sense of futile loss was eventually banished by their most important technological innovation - consciousness transfer.

Near mortal death, this advanced process allows the psyche and memories of the subject to be transferred into another physical body. Brain-dead 'shell' bodies are grown especially for this purpose, allowing the consciousness of the individual to endure beyond natural demise. This simple summary represents the limits of human understanding of this revered and enigmatic process.

In this manner, some Shaltari have 'lived' for millennia, progressing through dozens of bodies. These 'Elders' have vast levels of experience at their disposal, knowledge which enabled the Shaltari to expand technologically beyond the scope of all other known races.

An unfortunate (and probably inevitable) psychological side effect of this practice is that Shaltari develop an increasingly acute and pathological fear of death as the eons pass. The Shaltari have no known religion and view death as simply the end of existence. Having lived for millennia, the Elders are terrified of death above all things. This makes their actions in battle quite remarkable and is a testament to their bravery in defeating this phobia.

The 'default' colour of a Shaltari seems to be a good indicator of the age of the consciousness. In general terms, the older the psyche, the paler their spines become. Young Shaltari are invariably dark in colour, while ancient Elders are white or even translucent. This colouration apparently has nothing to do with the physical age of the body, and is rather a reflection of the knowledge and experience of the individual. This trait is believed to be key to determining hierarchy in a race where learning is held in the highest esteem, as may have been the case since the earliest days of Shaltari evolution.



FIRSTBORNS

Although seemingly androgynous, there are Shaltari males and females, although they reproduce incredibly slowly. The time between conception and birth is believed to span beyond 20 years. This sluggish pace of reproduction reduced Shaltari expansion to a crawl in their early days of galactic exploration. With the introduction of consciousness transfer, death due to old age was banished into history, and numbers could increase at an appreciable rate. Despite this, the population is still relatively small and slow to expand, highlighting one of the few true weaknesses of the species as a force in the Galaxy.

Death from other causes can of course still occur, and as such the population is maintained by controlled breeding. The Shaltari believe that new personalities can bring fresh ideas and approaches into a society which would otherwise be in danger of stagnating. These newborn Shaltari are known as Firstborns. Once they have reached adulthood, they enter public life firmly at the bottom of the social ladder, with everything to prove and little to lose.



WARRIOR VENERATION

In current times, the most common way for a Shaltari to meet death is in battle. To the human psyche, it would seem logical that participation in war would be desperately avoided by such a race. This could not be further from the truth, due to the central tenet in Shaltari culture - Warrior Veneration.

While the Shaltari value knowledge above all else, they respect martial endeavour beyond all other undertakings. The Shaltari have had to fight for their existence countless times over millennia as starfarers. As such, their veneration for warriors has reached a zenith unequalled by the younger races.

This deep reverence has resulted in a dominant warlike subculture within Shaltari society. This is a clear two-tier structure where those who have never seen battle cannot even be bestowed with a name. The Shaltari believe that this basic level of respect can only be achieved by fighting for the race. This attitude has extended to dealings with humans, where Shaltari ambassadors refuse to speak to or address by name those without military experience.

The Shaltari abhor the use of drones and hold those who suggest their use as dishonourable, beneath contempt. Physically taking to the battlefield has always been held as the pinnacle of taking one's place in society.

Firstborn Shaltari almost always join the military, where they can earn the respect of their peers and subsequently advance in the hierarchy. They make up the bulk of the infantry, where mortality rates are at their highest. Firstborns have everything to prove and do not yet fear death. They are fiery and remorseless warriors.

Older individuals often remain in the military and regularly take to the battlefield. Many simply cannot stomach the adjustment to civilian life, and yearn for the chaos and symphony of battle. It is believed that a powerful, warlike nature is deeply engrained in Shaltari instincts, a fact which may go some way towards explaining their ferociousness in combat. Veteran Shaltari are normally seen at the helm of war machines, the perfect control of which often takes several biological lifetimes to master.

Fighting Elders are rare, and inevitably fulfil command roles. Those that have remained in the military for centuries (and even millennia) are clearly those born for nothing but war. They are peerless commanders, experienced to a level unfathomable to humans. Their mere survival illustrates that they have tasted victory countless times and have seldom known defeat.

THE TRIBES

Over time, the Shaltari have come to embrace the concept of strength through diversity, struggle and competition. Since they are accustomed to being the most advanced and powerful race in their spheres of influence, the only logical source for such contest has been with each other.

Throughout the ages, differences of opinion and various cultural nuances have developed between disparate groups, resulting in clear divisions within Shaltari society. These divisions are appreciated and indeed lauded by all Shaltari as a driving force for development, invention and improvement against stagnation.

These groups exhibit varying degrees of separation, and are characterised chiefly by their attitudes and culture. Individuals are often known to gravitate towards a group with similar opinions to their own, ensuring a constantly shifting genetic mix.

These differences have often led to disagreements, and occasionally open war between various groups. Battles are often kept small scale in nature, and are pursued only until honour is satisfied. Such 'Honour Feuds' are respected and even praised by Shaltari as necessary for the maintenance and furthering of strength. This is because they know of no greater opponents than themselves.

FIRSTBORNS

Although seemingly androgynous, there are Shaltari males and females, although they reproduce incredibly slowly. The time between conception and birth is believed to span beyond 20 years. This sluggish pace of reproduction reduced Shaltari expansion to a crawl in their early days of galactic exploration. With the introduction of consciousness transfer, death due to old age was banished into history, and numbers could increase at an appreciable rate. Despite this, the population is still relatively small and slow to expand, highlighting one of the few true weaknesses of the species as a force in the Galaxy.

Death from other causes can of course still occur, and as such the population is maintained by controlled breeding. The Shaltari believe that new personalities can bring fresh ideas and approaches into a society which would otherwise be in danger of stagnating. These newborn Shaltari are known as Firstborns. Once they have reached adulthood, they enter public life firmly at the bottom of the social ladder, with everything to prove and little to lose.



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Humans have come to refer to these distinct blocks as 'Tribes', a simple term used by early Shaltari ambassadors. Tribes were assigned designations corresponding to early indigenous Earth nations and cultures, a practice continued by the UCM (United Colonies of Mankind). These are normally allocated randomly and do not indicate any similarity between the Tribe and its original namesake. Ancient names such as Apache, Inuit, Amazon and Inca are in common usage once again, although now with very different connotations.

HOMEWORLDS

The Shaltari are fiercely protective of their mysterious homeworlds. Should another race stumble across one, they are normally shown no mercy and annihilated in short order, thus preventing any return visits. As such, almost nothing is known about the Shaltari homeworlds save that they are well distributed throughout the Galaxy.

RELATIONS WITH HUMANS

Mankind has had diplomatic relations with the Shaltari since the early days of human galactic exploration. Indeed, it was the Shaltari who chose to make first contact, and to guide mankind to the Cradle Worlds. The fact that this was done only to secure humanity as an ally against another Shaltari Tribe has characterised most subsequent dealings with them.

The Shaltari (and indeed humans) are pleased to make alliances in the face of mutual self interest, but will normally balk at shedding blood to the advantage of the other. As such, the history of human-Shaltari interaction has been a morass of conflicting alliances, power struggles and double-dealings.

The Shaltari language is multi-faceted and utterly impossible for humans to replicate. A vast vocal range, coupled with visual signals from colour changes combine to make it quite incomprehensible. Very few Shaltari 'words' (if such a crude term is applied) can even be spoken by humans. As such, any communication between the races is conducted in human languages, in which the Shaltari are fluent.

In this manner, the Shaltari have shared information with humans only sparingly, and at their own pace. This makes intelligence gathering extremely difficult, a fact which contributes to human ignorance. With little understanding of the true nature of their technology and a poor grasp of the language, most Shaltari individuals, constructs and devices are given crude human designations. This is done either by the UCM or by the Shaltari themselves, when seeking to facilitate easy communication.

Outright conflict between the Shaltari and humans has occurred frequently. Certain tribes for instance have an undisguised contempt for mankind and will take to the battlefield with the slightest provocation. Other tribes have been known to attack seemingly at random, guided

by various shadowy motives. Despite this, conflicts have never yet escalated into unbridled slaughter. The UCM recognises the danger of total war with such an advanced foe, while the Shaltari rightly appraise mankind's numerical superiority and rate of expansion as a potent threat.

Relations with the newly revealed PHR (Post-Human Republic) have so far followed similar lines as with the UCM. In a worrying development, the PHR seems to be allying itself with Tribes typically in conflict with the UCM, or with those that are traditional enemies of UCM allies.

SHALTARI TECHNOLOGY

TELEPORT GATES

A central pillar of Shaltari battlefield technology and strategy is teleportation. This allows for troops to be deployed, rerouted and extracted in a matter of seconds, without needlessly putting lives at risk during transit. Their tactical manoeuvres are therefore quite unlike those of any other known race, making them slippery and formidable adversaries.

In this manner, an entire army can eventually deploy from a single teleport gate (the Shaltari equivalent of dropships). Units can be instantly transferred between battlefield positions through the use of multiple gates, since troops can only materialise in the direct vicinity of a gate. These gates always feature a ring of focusing devices and a central core, similar in appearance to a cut gemstone.

A mothership (normally in orbit) physically holds units until they are needed on the ground, thus removing the risks associated with transporting troops. This mothership provides the raw power behind this technology, while the teleport gates merely act as fulcrums for the system, reducing their power requirements to manageable levels. Indeed, it's understood that when troops are rerouted on the ground they in fact always transfer via the mothership. The actual mechanics of this process are of course a complete mystery to human science, which is well behind such dazzling advancements.

VEHICLES

Shaltari vehicles are highly distinctive, and justly famous for their geometric complexity and exquisite splendour. Many have likened their appearance to jewellery, although this masks their true nature as beautifully engineered killing machines. It is understood by UCM scientists that practically every apparently ornamental feature has a real function, the nature of which is normally a complete enigma.

Shaltari vehicles are often brightly coloured to indicate their alignment to a particular Tribe. This practice relates directly to Shaltari notions of martial honour, where concealment is regarded as cowardly and dishonourable. In any case, camouflage is primitive protection compared to a combination of lighting speed and peerless shielding.

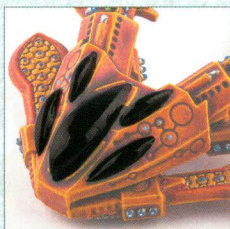
Most Shaltari vehicles and constructs share a common set of systems:

Armour - Shaltari vehicles normally rely on their blistering speed and advanced energy shields to protect them from harm. Despite this, Shaltari vehicles are encased in a layer of armour with a phenomenal strength-weight ratio. This remarkable lightness enhances efficiency as well as speed. However, when their energy shields are breached, their thin armour makes them relatively fragile compared to human counterparts.



Pilot - All Shaltari vehicles have at least one living pilot, since they regard the use of unmanned drones as the height of dishonour. The Shaltari also seem to share the human sentiment that there's no substitute for the split second judgements which can only be made by a living pilot. Many individuals have had several natural lifetimes to master their machines, and share an empathy with them unmatched by any human pilot.

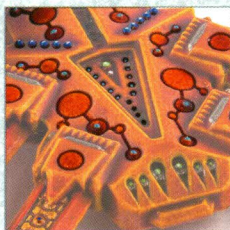
Vision Canopy - An obvious visual feature of Shaltari vehicles are their dark canopies. While these can appear to be conventional windows, they are in fact some sort of advanced opaque optical membrane. This transmits visual information to the pilot via neural link and can provide unparalleled clarity of vision and situational awareness to crew members.



Power Network - Shaltari power cores are clearly staggeringly advanced. Thermal scans indicate that a single core is typically no larger than a cubic foot. Most Shaltari vehicles have a network of such small cores spread throughout the construct, presumably increasing efficiency and providing redundancy in the face of damage. Should the vehicle be destroyed, these cores automatically collapse in a controlled manner, making study by other races impossible.

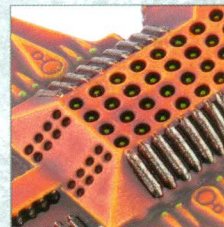


Teleport Web - For a unit to be teleport-capable, it requires a complex embedded web of locator systems to define its various aspects. This fact represents one of the few limitations of Shaltari teleportation technology, as only constructs completely encased in such a web can be transferred.



Mass Repulsion Drive -

The majority of Shaltari vehicles serenely glide over the battlefield in a manner popularly known as 'anti-grav'. The mechanics of these drives are completely baffling, although it's reasonable to assume that they are far more advanced versions of those used by the Scourge. Shaltari aircraft can certainly function for prolonged periods at higher altitudes than those managed by the Scourge, although they have been observed to utilise similar freefall insertion methods. Extraction is achieved by tractor beam, once they have reached their maximum flight ceiling. The main structures associated with these drives are prominent, paddle-like features, especially prevalent on Shaltari aircraft. These remarkable drives also provide impulse to move the vehicle at high speeds with ridiculous manoeuvrability. All this is achieved in complete, eerie silence.



Active Countermeasures - All Shaltari vehicles utilise active countermeasures, which are in many ways similar to those employed by UCM forces, although they operate more efficiently.

Passive Countermeasures - Shaltari vehicles also employ all-encompassing, passive energy shields. These are easily the most advanced and effective examples of such technology yet witnessed by man. They provide reasonable additional protection at all ranges from all types of attack, even by directed energy weapons.

WEAPONRY

Shaltari gunnery is rightly feared, their weapons being the most advanced yet encountered by mankind. A wide array of lethal devices can bring shattering firepower to bear from afar. Only the very strongest armour can hope to withstand such overwhelming force.

Gauss Cannon -

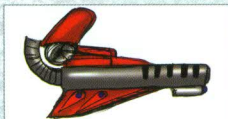
These formidable kinetic energy weapons represent the core of Shaltari anti-armour firepower. While they bear superficial similarities to UCM railguns, the Gauss Cannon is quite different, and altogether more dangerous. A thin, dart like projectile is magnetically accelerated to a stupefying velocity, causing catastrophic damage on impact. While the projectile is somewhat lighter than human equivalents, its speed is far higher, increasing range against countermeasures with comparable energy. These projectiles are manufactured with pristine, nano-engineered surfaces to reduce air friction and thus are not followed by a telltale trail of ignited air when fired. These weapons are also more efficient and accurate than railguns. Tales are rife of destroyed vehicles featuring tiny entry cavities, and massive, twisted exit gashes caused by the freak velocity of these deadly darts.



Gauss Rifle - A miniaturised version of the devastating Gauss Cannon, carried as light anti-armour support by Shaltari infantry. Their much lower energy is compensated for by pinpoint accuracy. They are often employed against tiny weak spots on enemy armour, such as joints, treads or vent slits.



Discus Launcher - These compact horrors are the primary small-arm of Shaltari infantry, and are usually wielded in pairs. They fire 2" wide, disc shaped, airbursting bomblets at moderate velocities at a rate of over 150 per minute. These fearsome projectiles detonate into tiny, lethal fragments at a set distance from impact, causing terrible lacerations to all those caught in the blast. The effect has been described as similar to that of a shotgun, but delivered at longer range. Their lack of penetrative power is more than compensated for by their effectiveness against multiple, lightly armoured targets. They are superlative anti-infantry weapons when the user is faced with superior numbers, as Shaltari troops usually are.



Ion Cannon - These ubiquitous directed energy weapons are normally employed in the anti-air role. They fire pulses of ionised particles at a frightening rate, causing catastrophic system failures and physical damage on contact. Their high rate of fire coupled with extreme accuracy make them excellent anti-air weapons, where their lack of absolute power is offset by the relative weakness of typical aircraft armour.



Wave Gun - This terrifying weapon exists for a single purpose - the extermination of enemy infantry. Normally mounted on light scout vehicles, these guns are horrifyingly effective. The Wave Gun projects beams of high energy microwaves towards biological targets, causing blood to boil and skin to cook in a matter of seconds. This is undoubtedly a horrible way to die, and thus these weapons are most feared by infantry unfortunate enough to face the Shaltari in battle. Handheld versions also exist, and are often paired with energy swords for room clearance, where their terrible effects can effectively incapacitate a target, allowing the user to close in for the kill.



Particle Cannon - The Particle Cannon is quite simply the most powerful directed energy battlefield weapon yet witnessed by humankind. Only found on large Shaltari constructs, these awesome beasts measure nearly 35 feet in length, and can annihilate a heavy battle tank with ease at incredible range. This absurd killing power is achieved by somehow projecting a 'vacuum tunnel' ahead of the muzzle, through which a torrent of highly energised particles is sent at near relativistic speeds. The effect this has on an unfortunate victim is staggering to behold, as even large, heavily armoured targets are sliced to molten wreckage in an instant. All forms of countermeasures are utterly ineffective in the face of such volcanic devastation. The only real downside is a very low rate of fire, as even Shaltari power cores need time to accumulate the vast reserves of energy needed for the cataclysmic shot.



BRAVES

Shaltari infantry (UCM designation - 'Braves') are formidable opponents. Shaltari counteract their rather diminutive stature by taking to the battlefield in lithe, armoured exoskeletons over eight feet in height known as Warsuits. Their amazing agility is often quite disquieting to human observers, given their large size. They also feature a teleport web, and as such can be transferred where needed without risk in transit.

The Warsuit greatly enhances the user's strength, empowering Braves to carry devastating small-arms, such as the Gauss Rifle and Discus Launcher. They also feature miniaturised active countermeasure systems, greatly reducing the effective range of enemy small-arms fire. This combination grants the standard Shaltari soldier the kind of power which human infantry grunts can only dream of. This is often essential, since Braves are almost always outnumbered.



SHALTIARI-UNITS

SHALTARI COLOUR SCHEMES

Below are some examples of the livery of some of the most frequently encountered and/or infamous Shaltari Tribes. The Shaltari routinely take to the battlefield in vividly coloured constructs, eschewing all forms of camouflage as primitive and dishonourable. While their UCM designated Tribe names bear no relation to their actual character, tribal art is a good source of inspiration for Shaltari colour schemes.



APACHE



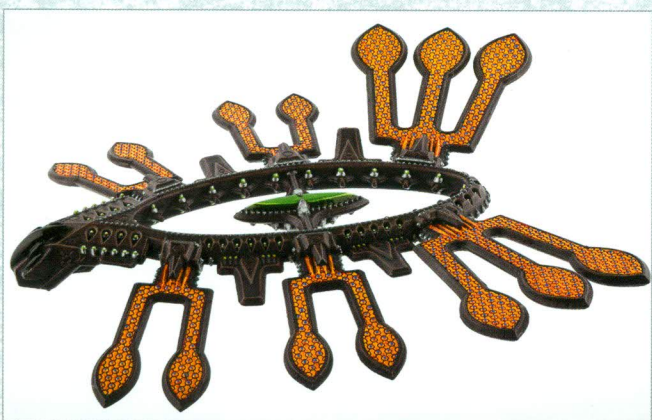
CHEROKEE



AZTECS



AMAZONS



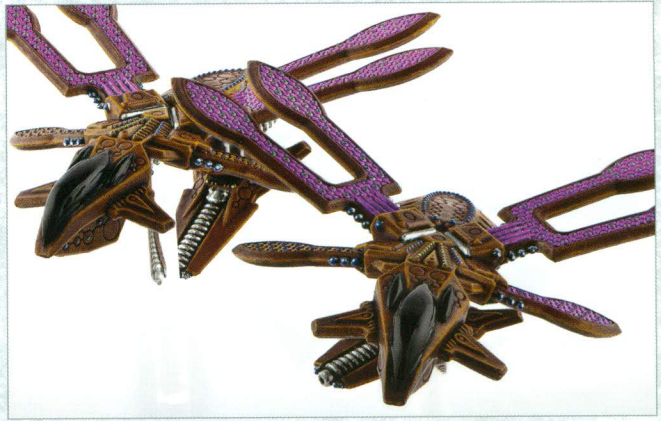
MONGOLS



ICINI



MASAI



ZULUS



LOMBARDS



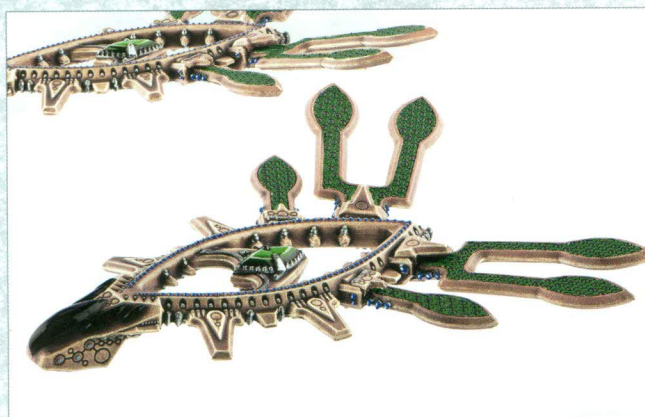
INUIT



COMANCHE



AVARS



MAYA



TLAXCALLAN

≡ GUEST PAINTERS ≡

Weathered Archangel
- Samuel Wright



Yari Light Grav-Tanks
- John Hood

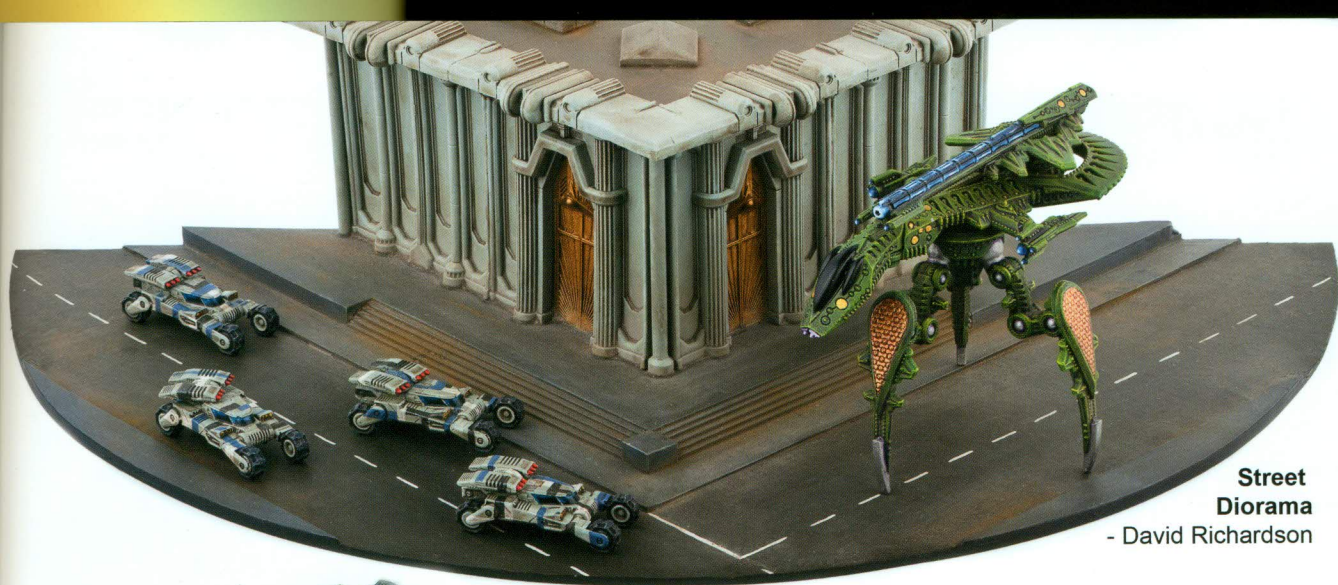
Intruder Deploying and Desolator
- Mark Rodgers



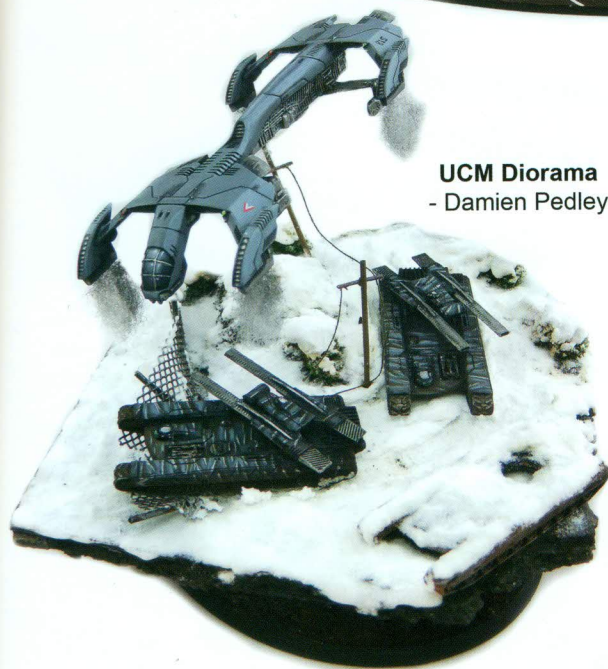
Athena Diorama
- Conrad Mynett



Menchit Battle Walkers
- Chris Sullivan



**Street
Diorama**
- David Richardson



UCM Diorama
- Damien Pedley



PHR Diorama
- Peter Bell



Mixed Pieces
- Garry Connell of
Golem Painting Studio

